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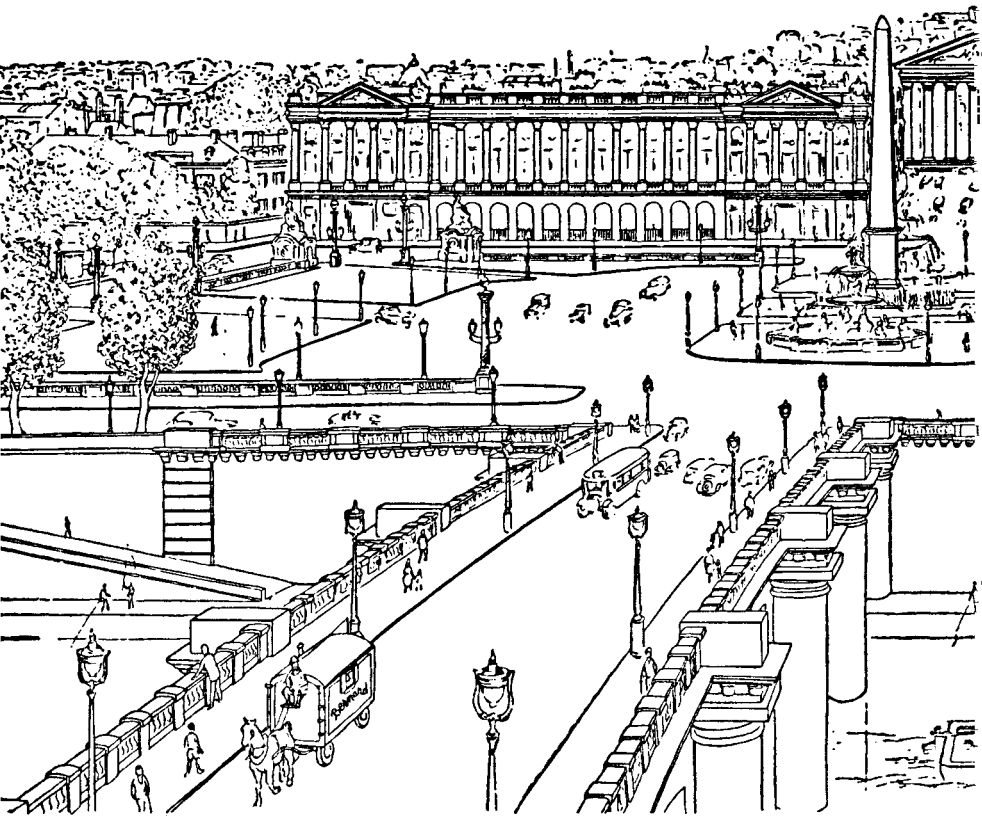

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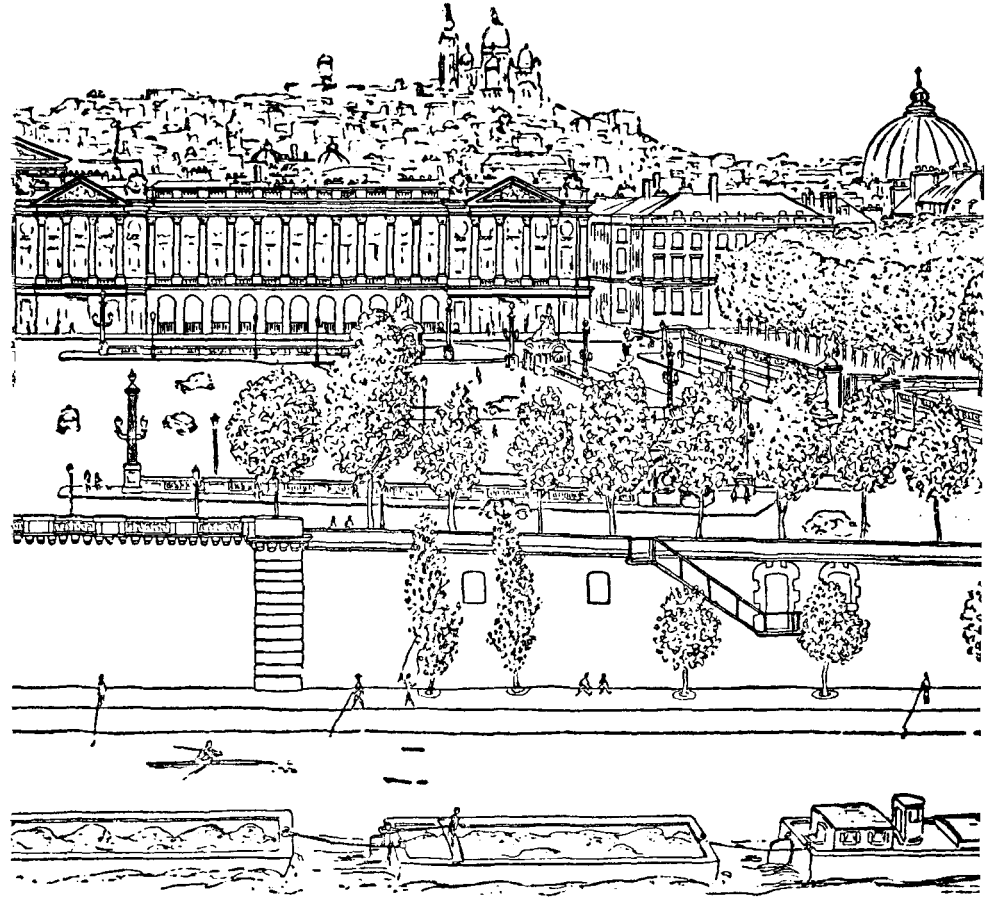

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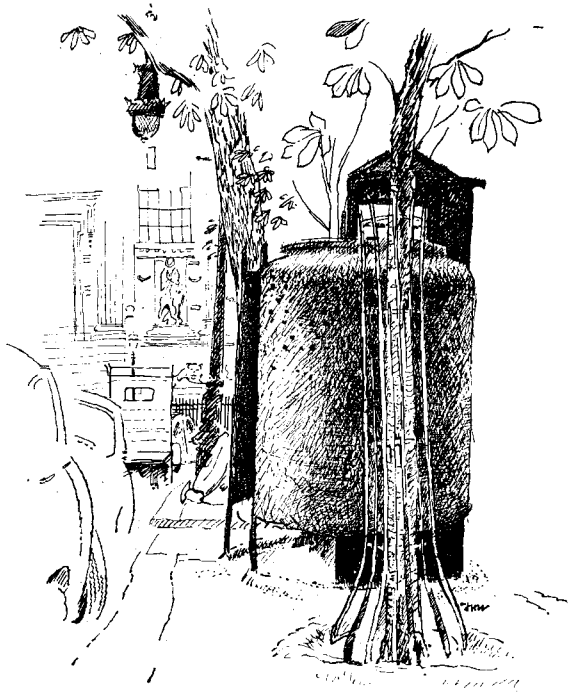

NUMBER TWENTY-SEVEN

FICTION

Mauro Senesi	*The Revolutionary*	13
Harry Mathews	*The Conversions*	112

INTERVIEW

Mary McCarthy	*The Art of Fiction XXVII*	58

PORTFOLIO

Bram van Velde	*Paintings and 7 prison drawings*	100

CHRONICLE

Clancy Sigal	*Last Day at the Agency*	24

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POETRY

Robert Bly	*Five American Poems*	18
May Swenson	*Death Invited*	22
Adrienne Rich	*End of an Era*	52
Charles Tomlinson	*John Maydew, or the Allotment*	54
John Heath-Stubbs	*The Peacock and the Snake*	57
Denise Levertov	*Love Song*	95
John Hollander	*Lazienka*	96
Philip Levine	*The Turning*	99
Bink Noll	*Per Singulos Dies Benedicimus Te*	110
George Macbeth	*Eating Ice-Cream with a Girl*	111

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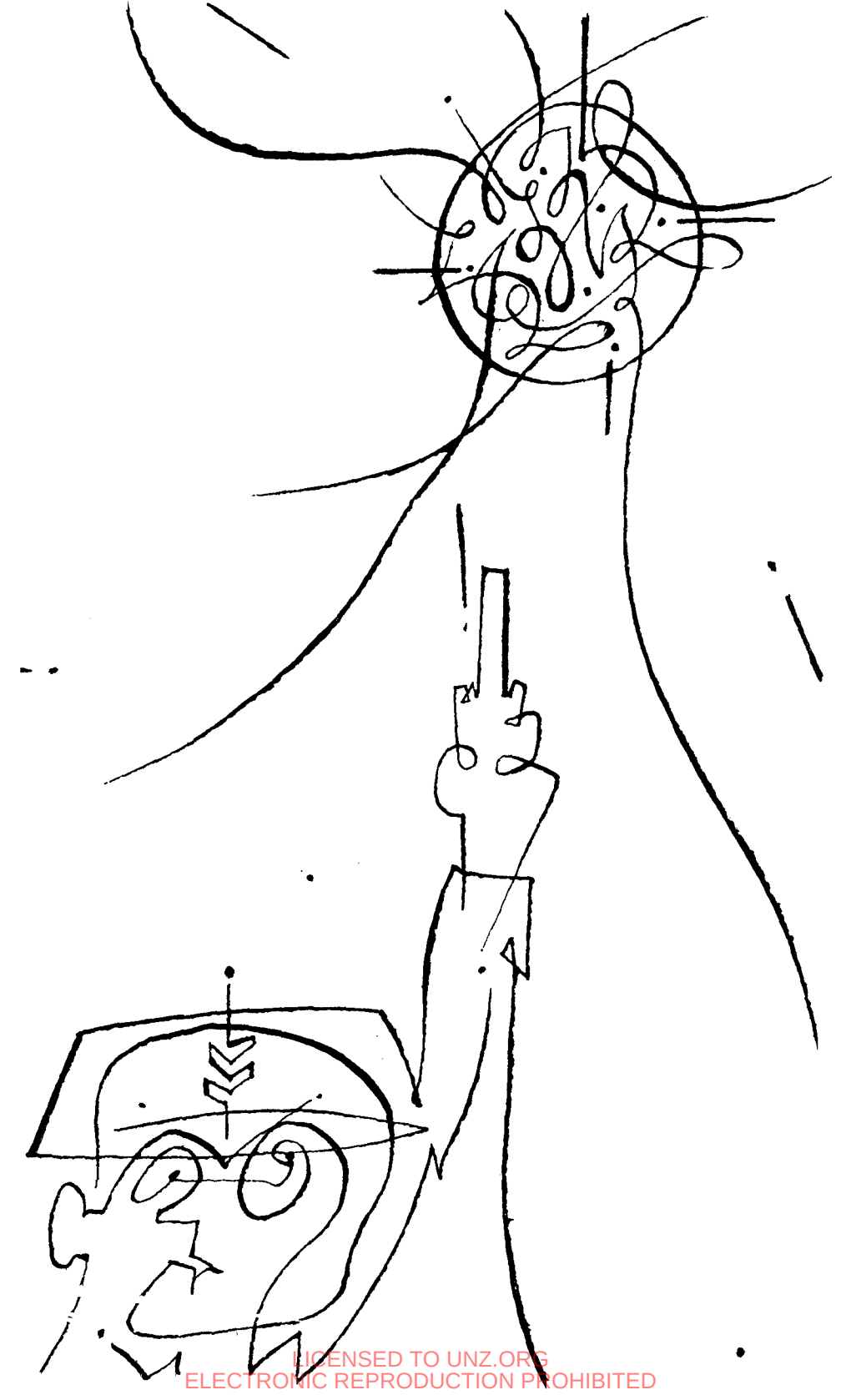

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MAURO SENESI

The Revolutionary

Right on the stroke of noon, and all of a sudden, when the revolution—at least according to the government radio station—was almost under full control, the eyes of Adias turned wild. They turned wild and at first I didn't understand, because up until then Adias had been a calm and good man, with the pupils of his eyes quiet like those of a household pet.

I've had enough now, he said, now the right time has come.

He ran out of the house, and if I followed him, it was, more than anything else, for a kind of amused curiosity. Outside in fact it seemed one great party, despite several bodies lying there dead on the ground. The bombs burst happily all around us, and the wounded, on the sidewalks, used up their last breath to shout like children on a merry-go-round.

There's no help for it, it was really a party, no matter how much desire for pity, for reasonableness, for sorrow one might have in his heart. Besides, for me it was a remote revolution, with the dead distant and the causes unknown. Adias himself was a distant friend of mine, known for only a few weeks and now, with that fury in his eyes, it was like seeing a distant acquaintance of yours who gets dressed up, at Carnival time, in a grotesque mask and then thinks he can scare you, but you laugh and so he really gets mad: he just might make up his mind, if you don't take him seriously, to kill you.

So I took him seriously, saying to him: Adias, what are you doing? where are you going? what's got into you? Adias, slow down, please.

And he without answering searched among the dead and

–illustration by James Worth

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finally he found it, a sergeant: he took the sergeant's cap and put it on his head, pulling down hard. How do I look? he asked me and said: this is my very own revolution, my own hour.

I told him: if you waited, you could find a general's corpse and take his cap. Generals give more orders and their caps, I said, are fancier, more authoritative.

What do I care, Adias said, being a sergeant is enough, and having a pistol. He looked around and his eyes were wilder and wilder. They turn black even if they're fair—eyes become huge when they turn wild, even if they are normally tiny, normally quiet and timid: now I know.

The metamorphosis of Adias was really extraordinary, especially when he had freed from the hand of another corpse, a revolutionary's, an incredibly large pistol: he gave a shot into the air and it seemed that the sun, nothing less, had been hit.

The sun became, by a strange coincidence, dark and red and flabby, its rays all gone, so that it looked like the yolk of an egg and not a few people were killed in that minute, while they stood still to look at the phenomenon: a real sharpshooter's phenomenon.

Anyway, when the others died or killed they were fully composed and sometimes even smiling, like the targets and crack shots at a summer fair, even though their composure and their smiles were stupid as can be. Adias was the only person I saw pervaded with a genuine fury—he chose streets and alleys and ran down them without anyone's daring to get in his way and stop him: something that certainly should have been done, wherever he was going. And I least of all, I even took advantage of the path he was clearing.

Once when I tried to get away, he realized it immediately and took hold of me. You have to come with me, he said, and see what I do, because if no one sees it's useless for me to do it.

For a second his eyes were no longer wild, but instead extremely knowledgeable, so much so that I took the opportunity to ask him again where he was going and what he

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planned to do. Because, you understand, I added, for me this is a distant revolution and I don't intend to compromise myself.

Mine, he said, is no distant revolution: it's the closest revolution a man can live or see. I'll live it, he laughed, and you'll stay to see. Once in a lifetime, he said, while the fury turned his eyes wild again, the time is ripe, and a man can be as hateful as he wants and another man can see what it's like.

I asked him against whom he wanted to be hateful. He didn't answer and so I asked him: whoever it is, what's he done to you? Yesterday I wouldn't have thought, I said to him then, that you had great wrongs to avenge.

I shouldn't have thought so either, he said, but today I think so. And he counted all the house numbers along that street, which must have been the right street: three five seven, thirteen fifteen seventeen; at twenty-five he stopped and, with a kick, opened the door, although a simple twist of the handle would have swung it open with no trouble at all.

He ran up the stairs and I behind him; he pointed his pistol and fired at a closed door. A hole showed then in the wood, but the door didn't give when he pushed it. From within, however, a key turned, the door opened a little: on the other side we saw a rather ugly girl, dressed in yellow, who had an enormous chest, completely out of proportion to the rest of her body and especially to her legs, which were skinny and small-boned like a child's.

It's her, Adias told me, that I hate.

We pushed by her into the room. The girl looked at him quite stupidly and I looked at her, her enormous chest, the dry legs that barely held it up. Who, me? she asked my distant friend as I too asked him: who, her?

Her, said Adias, and he pressed his pistol against her chest. She refused me, he began to explain, when she accepted all the others. She refused me when she was twelve years old...

She was too young, I interrupted him, maybe she was too young.

She refused me again when she was seventeen, he went on,

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and again when she was twenty and again three days ago when she was twenty-four.

Who knows—she might be engaged, I suggested, or perhaps she intends to become a nun.

No, said Adias bitterly, because in the meantime I've seen her disappear with seventeen men. The last time, he specified, she even preferred a man without a nose to me.

It's not his fault if he doesn't have a nose, the girl intervened. He got it eaten off by cancer, and honestly, I went with him out of pity.

But Adias began to shout and his eyes were wilder and wilder. I was afraid from one minute to the next that he might press the trigger of his pistol and so I said to him: now Adias, how can you hate such a pretty girl? who, I added, is now, the way things are, absolutely willing to go with you wherever you want? Fear, I added softly, is better than pity.

In fact she acknowledged at once, with a nod more of her enormous chest than of her head, that she was absolutely willing. Wherever you want, she promised softly, and she had, as she looked at him, eyes full of swamp-water, still eyes every bit as much as his were wild.

It's late, said Adias. If by now hate has taken the place of love, I want to express my hate and not my former feeling. Whether this little whore says yes or no, he said, looking with disgust at the girl's chest, doesn't count any more.

Outside, in the meantime, the revolution was abating: the shots came less often, the cries were weaker, the dead were silent. At sunset everything will be calm, I reminded Adias, and the nights after a revolution are long quiet nights: who says it doesn't count, I said, with a wink of my eye, whether a girl like her says yes or no.

I've longed so long, Adias tried to insist, I've plotted so long in all the dampest cellars of the city for the moment of revenge to come, and for me to have a sergeant's cap on my head and a pistol in my hand and you in front of me, he said to the girl, to make you pay.

Oh, she said, really? rubbing her chest against the pistol which he imperceptibly lowered, while the cap too slid

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down off his head, several sizes too large as it was for him. His eyes, however, remained wild: the pupils, that is, tiny in the middle and the blood all around, with the lids trembling above, the blood whirling all around, and it suffused even the iris, which in fact seemed a rainbow swallowed up in the sunset.

Outside the sun was beginning to set, was already low on the houses in the outskirts of town, and the revolution had only infrequent starts: someone shooting his left-over ammunition at the dogs. The girl's eyes, instead, were greenish, still water—so still that they gave out a feeling of putrefaction. So as to make me say, in spite of myself, to my distant friend: why don't we take off? there are so many better girls, in a revolution.

No, he said suddenly, I want to stay here. Since the fury didn't abate in his eyes, I thought he wanted to stay there to kill her and, anyway, seeing as how there are so many girls killed and cut up in any revolution, I was deciding to wash my hands of the whole story (which is banal and stupid isn't it? in the telling: a usual story of love and revenge). Even more, I wanted to wash my hands of it because the girl's eyes and chest seemed full of swamp-water.

When lo and behold my distant acquaintance Adias threw away cap and pistol and knelt down, soft and delicate before her dry legs, timidly caressing her wrinkled skirt, and he begged her: forgive me, forgive me, forgive me. It was dark already outside. All his fury dissolved into tears.

The revolution was over and therefore this was the last shot: softly she had taken the pistol, while Adias delicately caressed her, on her non-existent hips, without daring to arrive at her overbearing chest, while I was discreetly tiptoeing away... she had taken the pistol and had shot him, my friend, right in the middle of his forehead.

These revolutionaries, she asked me then, what do they think they're doing?

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FIVE AMERICAN POEMS

by ROBERT BLY

POEM

I

If we are truly free and live in a free country,
When shall I be without this heaviness of mind?
When shall I have peace? Peace this way and peace that way?
I have already looked beneath the street
And there I saw the bitter waters going down,
The ancient worms eating up the sky.

II

Christ did not come to redeem our sins
The Christ child was not obedient to his parents
The Kingdom of Heaven does not mean the next life
God did not give our parents to us
No one in business can be a Christian
The two worlds are both in this world

III

The saints rejoice out loud upon their beds!
Their song moves through the troubled sea
The way the holy tortoise moves
From dark blue into troubled green
Or ghost crabs move above the dolomite.
The thieves are crying in the wild asparagus.

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WITH PALE WOMEN IN MARYLAND

With pale women in Maryland,
Passing the proud and tragic pastures,
And stupefied with love
And the stupendous burdens of the foreign trees,
As all before us lived, dazed
With overabundant love in the reach of the Chesapeake,
Past the tobacco warehouse, through our dark lives
Like those before, we move to the death we love
With pale women in Maryland

WIND

I

The wind through the box-elder trees
Is like rides at dusk on a white horse,
Wars for your country, and fighting the British.

II

I wonder if Washington listened to the trees.
All morning I have been sitting in grass,
Higher than my eyes, beneath trees,
And listening upward, to the wind in leaves.
Suddenly I realize there is one thing more:
There is also the wind through the high grass.

III

There are palaces, boats, silence among white buildings,
Iced drinks on marble tops among cool rooms;
It is also good to be poor, and listen to the wind.

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NEARING THE MIDDLE WEST

I

All along the road I have been thinking of trees,
And now at last to come to this sea of trees—
The useless hills of Wisconsin.

II

In Ohio I first noticed the trees,
And north of Columbus I saw a lone tree
Looking over the pale oats.

III

At last, we cross the river, and come
To the bluffs of the Mississippi,
The long stretches smoky with trees,
These hills at five o'clock, bathed
In the holy sun of Catlin.

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ANDREW JACKSON'S SPEECH

Dido to Aeneas: "*I have broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus.*"

I heard Andrew Jackson say, as he rose from his grave:

"The harsh ravishers in Detroit, inheritors of the soot
Of chimney boys, when they raised the mighty poor,
Broke faith with the cinders of Sichaeus.

"I shot to save the honor of my wife;
And I would shoot again, to save my people.
The Republic lies in the blossoms of Washington.

"The poor have been raised up by the Revolution.
Washington, riding in cold snow at Valley Forge,
Warned the poor never to take another husband."

His voice rose in the noisy streets of Detroit.

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MAY SWENSON

DEATH INVITED

Death invited to break its horns
on the spread
cloth. To drop its head
on the dragged flag on the sand.
Death's hooves slipping
in blood, and a band
of blood down the black side.
Death's tongue, curved in the open mouth
like a gray horn, dripping
blood. And
six colored agonies decking the summit
of death's muscled pride.
Death invited to die.

The head
of death, with bewildered raging eye,
flagged down,
dragged down to the red
cloth on the sand.
Death invited to stand,
legs spread,
on the spot of the cape.
To buckle stubborn knees and lie
down in blood on the silken shape.
Beg blindness come to the sun-pierced eye.

The sword, sunk at the top of the shoulder's pride—
its hilt a silver cross—drawn forth now lets
hot radiant blood slide
from bubbling nostrils
through cloth to thirsty ground.

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Yearning horns found
fleeing cloth and bloodless pillow,
substance none. Arrogant thighs,
that swiped and turned death by,
now, close as love, above lean lunging,
filling the pain-hot eye.

That stares till it turns to blood.
With the short knife dug
quick!
to the nape.
And the thick
neck drops on the spot of the cape.

Chains are drawn
round the horns, whose points are clean.
Trumpets shout.
New sand is thrown
where death's blood streamed.
Four stout,
jingling horses, with gilded hooves,
tug death out.

Life is awarded ears and flowers.
Pelted with hats and shoes, passion and praise,
glittering life, in tight pink thighs,
swaggers round a rotunda of screams and *Oles*.

Death is dragged from the ring,
a clumsy hide,
a finished thing—
back to its pen.
The gate swings shut.

The gate swings wide.
Here comes trotting, snorting death
let loose again.

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CLANCY SIGAL

Last Day at the Agency

I awoke early in my apartment and rested quietly for an hour. Then I phoned my office to say that I would be in. Lucy, my secretary, was pleased, and said that she was thinking of getting married. We gossiped a few moments, then I got out of bed, slowly, and took a cold shower and shaved my beard off. I had let it grow while I was ill and seeing nobody. I regretted seeing it go and made a game of shaving, first removing one sideburn, then half a mustache, then the other sideburn, until all that was left was half a mustache on a clean-shaven face. I looked like a mad Albanian peasant. I was laughing so hard I had to sit down on the edge of the bathtub.

I put on my charcoal-brown suit. I dressed neatly and carefully while listening to some of my jazz records. George Mitchell's "Tin Roof Blues," which many people take for Louis, and Brubeck's "Perdido" I put on twice, and then I went downstairs from my garage apartment and out to my car. I said hello to the woman from the yellow stucco house in front who was hanging wash in the garden we shared. "Sweet day, isn't it?" she said. It was what she said ten months out of the year whenever we chanced upon each other in the driveway. She and her family were from Eau Clair, Wisconsin. They stayed up watching television until one or two most every morning, two sets of grandparents, husband and wife, three children. As I always did ten months out of each year, I smiled and agreed. It was very warm and sunny with hardly a breeze to move the leaves in the trees lining the quiet, sun-blasted street.

My car was still there. I loved it. Sixteen years old, with a

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crushed-in rear end, a torn right fender and a hood that was liable to fly open at speeds exceeding forty miles per hour. None of the original paint was left; before I bought it someone had scraped it down to its original rusty gray metallic finish which it must have had before it went under the paint spray at the Flint factory. Under the hot sun it look gruesome. My friends always said it was the kind of car hacked-up bodies of domestic murder victims were left in. I loved that old car. It ran smooth as cream. Coming back from my daily rounds at the film studios in the valley I used to beat Cadillacs and Lincolns because my car was so quick off the mark at traffic signals, not like those sluggish Firedome Eight battleships.

The top of the car was spattered with bird droppings and buds from the overhanging juniper tree under which it had been parked for the past month. I rolled down all the windows to air it out. I got in but it wouldn't start. I wasn't worried. It seldom did after inactivity. I got out and raised the hood and twisted the idle screw forward. When I got back in, the motor started instantly. The idle screw: it was that kind of car. I pushed open the wind vent and let the motor idle a few moments. Then I started for the office.

I felt very good driving my car for the first time in a month. I took the long way round, just to get the feel. It made the Clark Drive hill up to Sunset Boulevard in third (I had bought if for $100 after the salesman let me take it over Laurel Canyon pass without changing gears), and I turned north on the Strip towards the office, feeling better and better. The late-morning traffic was light. The Solomon Benedict Building was built into the middle of a palm-lined, grassed-up cul-de-sac where Burton Way intersected with Bedford Way and Santa Monica Boulevard. The cul-de-sac was called, legally and officially, Benedict Square. I turned in to the company parking lot and nosed in diagonally at my number, 38, between a new Chrysler convertible and a 1956 creme-and-green Cadillac belonging to fellows at the office. My car always stood out like a bloody sore thumb in that parking lot filled with gleaming new models, Lincolns, Jags, even

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a Mercedes, none of them ever over two years old. Status is peace carried on by other means. I had withstood a lot of pressure in not turning my old car in, and finally my bosses had put a good face on it by pointing out the old Pontiac to visiting firemen as a curio, the implication being that, of course, I had the money for a new car but felt queerly for that old wreck. Which wasn't so far from wrong either.

"Hey, stranger, where you been all our lives!" I crossed the street and shook hands with Andy and Joel, who ran the gas station across the boulevard from the agency. They were war friends, wiry and peppery, in their early forties. They had married once each, and now they were living with their mother, who cooked for them and was a physiotherapist at a Jewish hospital. Joel owned a small boat which he kept down at San Pedro. For over a year he kept asking me to come sailing one weekend, and when I finally did we weren't out an hour before we ran into a small fleet of Yugoslav tuna tugs with colored lamps and gay flags hanging all over them. Joel hollered over and got us invited aboard two of the tugs lashed to each other. Those Slavs were really jumping. Steaks, slivovitz, the works. It was their national feast day or something. We went down into one of the tugs and stayed all day, eating and drinking and singing to an accordion. The captain asked Joel to marry his daughter and Joel said sure, any time. Everybody pounded everybody else on the back and yelled "*Muy drug*" all day long. I had a ball. Joel was so drunk that one of the Yugoslav tuna sailors had to take his boat back for him. Joel's buddy, Andy, was even smaller, and a pugnacious man. He owned the parking lot concession for the night club next door to the gas station, and his right hand tended to be bandaged from slugging drunken playboys who cracked wise about the Jews. He was thinking of going into the picture-frame business because the oil company that controlled the property on which the station sat had decided to close out the business. Neither Andy nor Joel was bitter. "It's the way the ball bounces," shrugged Joel. "It's their way of making a living," said Andy. The friends were excellent mechanics and also thieves. Whenever

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my car needed repairs they fixed it up practically for free. But let a Cadillac or Lincoln roll in with a dirty spark plug, if they thought they could get away with it the boys would rip out the transmission and give in a bill for $400. That's how they were. During the war, they had been artillery officers in the Pacific. Once, over Buna, both had been flying as artillery spotters when their plane ran out of fuel and crashed to the ground. They were proud of the incident and liked to talk about it.

"Where you been, boychik?" chirped Joel. Sick for a while, I said. "Sick hell," rasped Andy, "he's just enervated on too much pooo-oo-nn-tang." This like to broke the boys up laughing. I must have been paler than I thought. They were being gentle. Joel said, "Say, boychik, what's this I hear about you leaving the office?" He nodded over at the four-story pale blue penthouse building across the boulevard. "Say it ain't so, Shoeless Joe." I said yes, I had given notice, though I hadn't decided just when. It might be months. My bosses were amenable. Some wanted me to stay. The consensus was, there was no rush.

Andy said disgustedly, "Ah, you're a hothead. You need a psychiatrist. A good job like that." Joel asked, with real concern, "What'll you do?" I thought and said, I'm not sure. Maybe look around.

Joel cocked a quiet look at me. "*Mishuga*, jobs like that don't grow on trees. Go first to a headshrinker. Andy and me went last year and he said we ought to leave Mama, remember, Andy? The *goneff*. He's never tasted Mama's *knadlach*. Still it was worth it for the laughs. I dated his receptionist until I found out she was going to him too. It's a funny world." A car drove up to the gas pumps. It was a new Imperial. Maybe it had a dirty spark plug. Joel and Andy jumped to service it, all smiles and chatter. I started to walk away. I heard Andy say, mournfully, "Hey, mister, you're leaking oil bad." I crossed the street. Just before I went into the office Joel shouted, "We'll miss you, boychik!" I waved and went inside and walked upstairs.

It was like stepping into a jungle of cold air. The air-

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conditioning was on. At the moment I did not feel like facing my assembled colleagues, and slipped into my private office just off the third-floor corridor. I closed the door behind me and pulled the venetian blinds and snapped on the floor lamp. Lucy had gotten everything ship-shape for me. I sat down in my red leather chair and looked through the interoffice memos piled in my IN tray. Then I buzzed Lucy. "G'morning, sweetie," she crackled through the box. "You know, there's a meeting."

She always said it like that to me, half reprovingly, and also to let me know that she knew I was very bored by the ceremony of the Monday morning meeting. Of course, I said, come on in with your notebook. I sat back. Lucy, discreet person that she was, came in by the hall door. She was, as usual, brightly dressed and plangently made up, her coal-black hair done up in a new-look bun, her large bright eyes heavily mascaraed. Lucy was almost fifty and had a seventeen-year-old daughter who played tennis and was doing badly in school. We talked about her problems a lot. A few months ago I recommended a remedial teacher, a friend of mine who had been thrown out of the Pacoima school system for "past activities." Esmeralda, my friend, had been good for the girl, and Lucy had been grateful to me. She was always being grateful for something, starting with our first week together when she knew I wanted to get rid of her. Slowly I had come to like and respect Lucy. She was a lady, a confused lady, a chronic, quite secret alcoholic and way, way out on some crazy limb of her own. She had braveness. And, also, she had persisted in liking me even though I didn't treat her well those first few weeks. Later on, I realized just how clever she was. Though frightened and a little mousy now, she had been around a great deal. When we finally got to know each other we used to sit around in the afternoons laughing together while she told stories of her lovers. She was very fast at shorthand and bloody awful at typing. But she was my right arm. I could tell Lucy anything. She was the person I had bequeathed my apartment to.

She remained at the door. "Hello, sweetie, how do you

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feel?" Not half bad, I said. I got up and kissed her on the cheek. She began to cry. I had learned not to become angry when she did that. "I'm not sad, you know," she said. Sure, I said. She sat down on the couch and began, skillfully, to wipe away the tears. How was it, being Les's secretary? I asked.

She looked up and grinned, showing those marvelous white young teeth of hers. "Don't ask," she said. "I think he hates me." He hates everybody. How's everything around here? I asked. She gave me a run-down, what clients had departed, what new clients had come in, who was squabbling with whom, which secretary was sleeping, or militantly not sleeping, with what agent. Normal, I said. "I suppose that's one word for it," Lucy said.

I sat on the desk and told her I wanted to dictate a short letter before I went to the meeting. Lucy was great. She never once asked me when I was going to leave. The letter had been bothering me for weeks, all the time I was lying in bed and growing my beard and watching television from 8 A.M. to one in the morning, getting up to go to the lavatory or make myself a sandwich in the kitchen. I had even taken my phone off the hook.

It wasn't an important letter, merely to a corresponding agent in New York to tell him that one of my clients had gone east. It had been on my mind. The client in question, a writer-director, wasn't poor but I liked him. Also, for himself, he needed work. I consoled myself that he had probably pulled a good job his first week in New York, but I didn't like the fact that I had delayed this long, out of laziness. Before I'd gotten sick, I had been doing things like that. If it hadn't been for Lucy checking up on me I probably would have done more. Okay, I said, here goes. She flipped open her pad and I dictated the letter, making up an excuse for the delay as I went along. Lucy took shorthand with her legs crossed and in perfect posture. It was only last year that she had graduated secretarial school, and she was always trying to do things the correct way, even when she was half crocked. She had, considering her small body, rather long

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and beautiful legs. That was one thing, I don't think she knew I liked her legs. All the while I was dictating the telephone and buzzer kept going. Lucy told them I was out.

I got up and straightened my tie. Lucy asked, before I went down to the meeting, would I go out and say hello to Shirley, my other secretary. I said I would, later. Shirley was eighteen and cute. She had visited me during my illness and had gotten into bed to watch the Democratic convention on TV with me. We had taken off our clothes and fooled around and not much else, the kind of thing you stop doing at her age. Shirley was a nice *hamisheh* but I didn't feel, in view of our history, like putting her first on my list of hellos. I did not tell Lucy any of this. She had been advising me for months to get it over with already with Shirley, and I wasn't much in love with the prospect of my two secretaries coffee-klatsching over my sexual regressions. Not that I had any assurances they weren't already, anyway.

I said Geronimo, and slipped out the door. I had to walk down the stairs and out the side door to get in through the ornate front entrance. It was hot as a stove out, and the sun striking the cement pavement of the cul-de-sac like to blinded me. Just in case Joel and Andy were waving from the gas station, I waved back, and then the pneumatically operated door swung open before I touched it. It was that kind of thing, later to be found in the American Express building in Paris, which gave me the creeps. Involuntarily, as I always did when entering the ground-floor suite where the agency brass lived, I hunched my shoulders slightly and went into a kind of subtle crouch.

"Benedict Agency, good morning... Benedict Agency, good morning," droned the switchboard operator, Rita, whose boyfriend was one of Micky Cohen's hoods. Rita was attractive in an inquisitive, bulky way, but men, including myself, stayed away from her. "G'morning, lover," said Estelle, the slim, harebrained receptionist. "Where ya been keepin'?" Estelle had just got married and had had to fight her fiancé, an orthodox Balkan from Riverside, who insisted that she shave her head before the wedding ceremony as a

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good wife should. Keeping cool, honey, I replied. I reminded myself to ask Lucy if she was serious about getting married.

Walking past the rows of desks I said hello to the secretaries and answered questions about my health. The doors to the private offices were open, their inhabitants already in the boss's office for the meeting. I noticed that all the interoffice memos in the IN and OUT trays were lying face down. That was a new rule, to prevent clients from reading what the agent said about them. Clients who dropped in unannounced always complicated an agent's job. Hermione, the outlandishly brawny office manager, stopped me. "How do you *feel?* Everybody's been *so* worried about you." I said, Hermione, I feel just fine, and then stepped into the solemn ceremony of the Morning meeting.

Everybody was there, in Sol's newly decorated Swedish-modernistic warehouse of an inner office, with its three-legged chairs and ceramic tables and originals on the walls and suffused lighting and the Brancusi out in the mosaic-tiled garden back of the slatted picture window. All the agents were there too, pads and pencils out, ties off, some unshaven, sipping coffee or munching Danish delivered daily by Sol's private baker. Only two women were present, Sol's faithful secretary, Natasha, and Laura Collins, head of the literary department and Sol's partner. The atmosphere of thinly concealed tension had a neutralizing effect: the men were demasculinized and the women defeminized. All three of Sol's telephones were off the hook. The Monday morning meeting was sacred, used by the owners of the firm to learn what had been happening during the previous week and to present to the agents the "situation in depth," as Laura liked to call it. It was also the meeting to discuss problems, plot strategy and where the agents had to 'fess up in public about their promises and boasts on the previous Monday. Tomorrow's Tuesday meeting, in Laura's office, concerned literary department problems solely. Wednesday morning the agents met again down at Sol's for a "vulnerability" meeting: to try to detect, by joint conspiracy, which Hollywood stars

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were the least happy with their agents and most open to "The Approach." Thursday morning was the television meeting, where the new pie in the sky was cut up. Friday there was no meeting. The agents could relax.

"... and I'm glad to announce that Horace Mock's wife called to report Horace is resting comfortably at Cedars of Lebanon," Sol was saying when I walked in. Heads turned towards me and Sol looked up. "Glad to see you again," he said.

Glad to see you, Sol, I said, taking my place with three other agents from my floor on Sol's expensive gold-threaded Italian-imported couch. "Also," Sol resumed, "it is my misfortune to tell you that Bob Sylvester died over the weekend. Natasha, send the usual flowers." "Gee, Sol," piped up Stanley, head of the television department, "I saw Bob only two weeks ago." "No," said Mal, the wiliest of the ground-floor agents, "that can't be right. He's been in a tent that long." "Oh," subsided Stanley, almost in a grumble. I picked up my pad and pencil (embossed, like all the others, with my name in raised, sequined letters) and made a doodle. On the other side of the large, parabolic room the two agents I worked most closely with acknowledged my presence, Les with an automatic wink, Howard with a secretive grin. Whenever Howard's ex-wife, a Chicago model, came into town I let them use my apartment in the afternoons. Howard was going with a hysterical Cajun, a Louisiana swamp woman he had met at A. B. Mayer's funeral. He was a bug on small-arms hunting but had to keep his .38 in the office for fear his ladyfriend would get at it. She had once been an attorney but wasn't much of anything now except a case. Howard was my best friend in the office.

I made more doodles while the meeting got down to business. Laddie, the ex-paratrooper whom everybody but Howard disliked (Howard found a reason to like everybody), nudged me warningly. I wrote down on the pad, "Leave me alone or I'll tell them what Frank Sinatra told me about you," and showed it to him. He showed me the finger surreptitiously. Laddie every Monday morning announced

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how he was going to bring Frank Sinatra into the agency. By now it was an office joke.

As far as I could tell, the meeting was going off smoothly enough. Sol, the president and chairman of the board of the agency, a former dry-goods peddler from the East Side of New York, was keeping a sharp, sad eye on his grammar: whenever he forgot himself with a "Goddammit!" it was usually a sign that someone in the assemblage, not excluding himself, had goofed. He wasn't using any "Goddammits!" this morning. But you never could tell with Sol. Sometimes, to everyone's relief, he forgot. But also sometimes, when he forgot, Natasha was at his elbow with a coy sibilant reminder, "Mr. Benedict, last week you asked me to remind you about Sophia Loren's new contract," and if Sophia Loren hadn't yet signed her agency contract some agent was bound to catch it in the neck. Everybody in the room except the owners of company stock feared Natasha. She didn't mean anything by it. She was only doing her job. And watch as closely as we could, none of us agents could ever detect the slightest glimmer of a smirk of satisfaction on Natasha's open, American face when she unlocked a can of peas.

It was Sol's custom to open the Monday morning meetings not with a prayer but with a soft, lugubrious report on which of the Hollywood moguls was sick, dying or dead. For the agents this pensive little service performed the duty of letting them gather their wits, gauge the boss's temper, prepare their pitch and pop a Miltown down the hatch. That was over now. Business had begun.

"Okay, fellas," said Sol, "what're our worries?" An unheard, collective sigh rippled around the room as legs stretched out, bodies fitted into chairs. The first to speak up was Chubbie, a stockholder by virtue of his mother's having lent Sol money in the early days. He usually spoke first on Monday mornings in order to impress the company directors with his right to keep the stock and also on the principle that he who buys the first drink is ever afterwards remembered and seldom asked again. He was the schnook of the class, the one who liked to think he was capable of brazening it

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out with the pros of the game, a fear-ridden china doll of a man cursed with just enough brains to know his own impotence. Chubbie had a psychosomatic eye twitch but otherwise would have made a perfect shoe salesman. He was a religious faddist. This year it was Vedantism, and he came to the office earlier than anyone else in order to listen to a Vedantist radio program on Station WBDO out of Salt Lake City; his wife, a friend of mine, abused and laughed at him. "We're in trouble with A.," said Chubbie, mentioning an aging lady star. "Lazner Agency is romancing her hard and I think she's going to leave us."

"What's the matter, fellas?" demanded Sol. "Why can't we get work for this lady?" Several agents, including myself, reported their efforts at the studios to get A. a job. Sol broke in. "What about Wilfred Morganstern at Metro? Christ, they used to be married. Don't he believe in old times?"

Mal Miller, the smooth swarthy agent who covered M-G-M, muttered, "I'll work on the *momser*. But you know, Sol, let's face it in the confines of this room. She's an old lady. Dry skin. Eyes. You know. Steady Eddie Lopat, he got old too, went to Baltimore."

"Okay," said Sol, "we keep trying. Laura, give her a few things to read. It'll keep her occupied." Laura Collins replied in her dry skeptical voice. "She don't want to read, Sol. She wants to work." Laura adjusted her Hattie Carnegie pearl-gray hat and straightened her severely tailored Balenciaga suit. She usually wore a hat in the office, always a soft felt slouch.

Sol said, "All right, so she wants to work. Find her a property." Laura raised her eyebrows. "So then what. We going to buy it for her?" Sol thought a moment. "Nah," said Sol. "Better she should go to Lazner. That bum."

Mal said quietly, "Sol, then there's B.," mentioning a medium-rank male star.

"Natasha, find out his contract dates. Mal, relax. I know he's a problem. It's only because he wants to play Beethoven and Schweitzer and crap like that. But he's not in bad shape, objectively. Subjectively, let him go to a psychiatrist. He's

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got no keeping money. He falls into jobs Palance won't have. Four or five independent pictures, 65G's plus 25 per cent, like Robert Ryan, and he's got an insurance policy for life."

"Okay," said Mal, "but he's still worried. And when he's worried I'm worried. Chubbie, give me a hand next time he drops in. He likes you." Mal knew Chubbie hated him for coming into the agency after Chubbie and pulling in three times the amount of business. Discreetly, he shivved Chubbie, but when out in the open was magnanimous and seldom let an opportunity pass to ostentatiously give Chubbie a pat on the back. It cost him nothing and anyway you never could tell when Laura would start getting sentimental over the sons of those who had befriended him.

"Next case," said Sol.

"C.," said Jack, the resident company lawyer, a phlegmatic, unemotional negotiator who was reputed, on no hard evidence, to have won his share of the agency in a Palm Spring poker game. He was less of a lawyer and more of an agent than any of us now. "Remember how we decided to dump him last week? I asked him to come in. But one look at that mouth and I was afraid to offer him a release. I thought he'd hit me. Mal, call him and dump him."

"Thanks a lot," said Mal. Everyone laughed quietly.

"Oh, before I forget, you all know," said Sol, "that Robert Sherwood died over the weekend." Howard said, "So did Bernard DeVoto."

Les said, "Well, Princeton beat Yale."

Tony, the big ex-football player from Southern Methodist with a beautiful evangelist wife who went to the Tia Juana bullfights every weekend, said, "D., Sol. It's like butting my head against a wall." "What is it, the money?" asked Sol.

"She keeps wanting a hundred thousand," said Tony.

"Bring her down to earth," said Jack. "There's nobody who's a hundred-thousand-dollar mother in the business today."

"So put her back on a horse," said Sol.

Les said, "E., Sol." Sol was surprised. "What about him?

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I thought we were working him." "Sure," said Les. "But commissions still going to MCA, not us. Do we want it that way?" "Look," said Jack, the lawyer, "his contract with MCA expires a year from now. Let's keep him working on single stupids and then lock him up in a term contract somewhere."

"He wants a term contract now."

"So don't get him one."

"Fellas, anything for F.?" requested Mal. Round the room a series of negatives from twenty agents. "Sol," said Mal, "she's a problem all right. She *hocks* me nice. But it's still *hock*ing."

"Let's put her in television." said Sol. "She's finished in movies."

"She don't want television. She hates it."

"Does she hate to live? Take her out to lunch and start insinuating. Next case."

And so it went. The problems, the dilemmas, the traffic jams, the emergencies and crises and panics. As the meeting went on, Sol's temper shortened. He grew tougher. A large part of him hated the business now that he was almost a millionaire. He thought he belonged at a higher station in life and cursed his early lack of education. About once a month he would come into my office and I would give him a list of books. The last time we had met on the street he said, "You know, kid, *Tom Jones* is marvelous. Art. I hope nobody makes a picture of it." I liked him. Considering that, on balance, I had lost him more money than I made him, he had been good to me.

In the middle of the agents' reports he burst in with a long, passionate speech about how the picture business was dying and how the agency must adapt to television. Since everyone in the room knew that the agency had had the jump gotten on it in television by rival agencies, and was fighting a losing battle, and had heard the same fervent speech every Monday for the past year, they just waited. When Sol was spent, they got down to business again.

"Metro needs two women for their new war script. Who

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we got?" "We'll put in G. and H." "No, we don't collect commissions on them." "Who we got?"

"Also a young boy." "Push I." "Do we collect on him yet?" "Not until January, Mr. Benedict." "Forget it until then."

"Did you mail the contract to J., Chubbie?" "No, Sol, not yet. I wanted to look at it first. His wife is a lawyer." "You're learning, Chubbie."

"Look, Sol, I did all I could to get K. into the Warners picture. Walter Buck opposed her." "I don't believe Walter Buck opposed her. He ain't got that much power any more. He's a yellow bastard."

"They don't like L. at Universal. I can't give him away."

"M., she's like A., a *kluge*. I can't handle her cursorily."

"C'mon you fellas, you ought to go to U.J.A. dinners. We do lots of business there."

"N.?" "She's happy. Don't want to work." "But I want her to work."

"O. just got a face lift. Eyes, ears, mouth and nose. She says she looks very pleasant now, and will we try again?"

"UA provides fifteen thousand dollars. P. gets fifty thousand and fifty thousand deferred, guaranteed five weeks, our choice director fifteen thousand same guarantee."

"I told you once, I told you twice, don't solicit new clients on company stationery. It ain't legal." "Sorry, Sol."

"Q. calls me every day, no small talk, just, 'What's doing kid?'"

"R., he's a bum and no use us kidding Paramount. Get him eight weeks at seventeen-five and five thousand deferred and we're all happy."

"Laura, advise S. to tell Roger Orr he hates the book. Orr don't trust nobody who doesn't insult him."

"Honestly..."

"Frankly..."

"Sincerely..."

"A thousand a week." "Laura, how'd you do it?" "Twisted his arm, that's how we got it." "One thousand. Laura, you're a sweetie."

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"Braverman wants T. to make p.a.'s." "Fuck 'im. Ruin his career. What's in it for him?" "Money. Braverman will pay." "That's different. Find out how much."

"You all know, it's the artists who are the crooks, not us. Steal, steal."

"I read the script. What do you want me to say, Sol?" "Say what you want. It's a fine script."

"Let's dump him too, Sol. He's a cryer. Oh what a whiner. *Grizzuhs. Grizzuhs* alla time. Talks about the past. I been there. I don't want to talk about it."

"Tell him eighteen days. He won't check it."

"Naw, it's not horseshit, whoever said that?" "I read the damn thing." "Okay, so?"

"He's a bum. I wouldn't let him step into the office. Phony!"

"I gave him the pitch right there in front of the MCA agent."

"Cohen is vindictive. Three and a half years to go on the contract; the boy's in a cage. He's *dead* dead."

"U. A nize boy. Devious."

"You just can't relax, fellas. Inscribe it on your hearts."

"Mike Connolly called, Sol. Asking questions about V.'s politics. What'll I tell him?" "Screw Connolly. The heat is wearing off. No, be polite. Tell him to talk to V.'s lawyer, we don't know nothing about politics around here. I'm giving a sigh, fellas. Lemme tell you about these Communists. I wish I had them back. Best writers, best guys, best commissions, worked steady month in and month out. Who cares who they gave their money to. One day we lost all of them because of creeps like Connolly. Best guys. I'm giving a sigh, fellas."

"W., Sol. They won't hire her unless they screw her or think they can. I told them no chance." "There's always a chance." "Ah, why don't they merge with Polly Adler."

"How you going to sell X. to RKO?" "How else? Spit like crazy."

"The only way to be completely honest is to cheat him without his knowing it."

"You made the deal, Chubbie. Now live with it."

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"He won't slim down, Sol. Sings better fat. Hell of a thing, got to shoot right away."

"Y. should see the loony picture. Take him with you. No, better not. Too close to home."

"He wants to believe things, always looking at the sky. A liar."

"Anybody with a low handicap can get to him."

"Somebody's lying, Mal." "Somebody's always lying, Sol."

"Z., how come we can't move her, fellas? Who's asleep?"

"A² is bitching me. I took him to lunch and romanced him—" "His last picture he was lucky to be taken to lunch."

"Can't budge her, Sol. Got great loyalty to Bartlett." "They messing around?"

"They got to pay for first look at the book. Make everything off the record. But get an offer."

"I told B² it was great." "Did you read it?" "Of course not."

"We're playing a little poker game."

"Just keep working on him, he'll plop."

"All about psychoanalysis and crap. Very interesting. Sell, yeah, sell good."

"Will he back us up?" "Yeah. To the wall."

"A giant is a cockroach compared to him."

"You're absolutely right, Sol."

"Thank you, Chubbie."

Sol made his final pitch television and then, a little tiredly, said, "Okay fellas." The meeting broke up. Some of the boys came around to ask about my health, and I asked after their families. Laddie grinned unpleasantly. "Wish *I* could get sick for a month."

I said hello to Natasha, shook hands with Sol and went upstairs to the third floor. I opened the door to the waiting room and went through it as quickly as decency allowed. I kept my eyes straight and blank, as if passing pustulated beggars. This time of the morning a queue was always in the waiting room, thumbing through old *New Yorkers* or leafing

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through their notes or simply sitting there, thinking. All of them would-be and frustrated and unsuccessful movie writers. Nathanael West's people.

When I first came to the agency it was my duty to care for them. All the new agents had to. It was called *schlach* work. You had to brush them off. Most of those in the waiting room were old-timers, and they were as anxious for me not to see them as the other way around. Kim, the new boy agent, had them as responsibilities now, Kim the stale-faced lazy kid who cleaned his teeth after every lunch with a dry toothbrush. I found this an extremely irritating habit for some reason. But I was glad I didn't have to bother with the *schlach* any more. Without looking twice I knew who was there. The perfumed British actor wrecked and half blinded by the war, whose mother and sister were killed in the blitz (he carried newspaper clippings) and who wrote plays in which the butler did it. A hamburger-joint proprietor who wanted to be a writer-director. A one-book novelist from Chattanooga who wasn't quite sure what he wanted to do in Hollywood but was sure that wasn't his problem. A once-important actor who had written a play about Lord Byron and wanted to play the lead. The Bronx Cocteau with a screenplay for sale about a homosexual who kills a cop and falls in love with the cop's wife. The Rin-Tin-Tin series writer who had written a "comedy" about an unemployment agency; I couldn't sleep the night I read it. The aging German actress who really wants a job acting but keeps pushing stories at agents, any agents, just so long as she can keep seeing people. A nice old lady from Thermopylae, Wyoming, who had once sold a book about the Indian guide Sacajawea to Vitagraph in 1926 and wants to make just one more sale. An ex-safecracker with his memoirs. The rest I didn't recognize.

I went inside the big office on my floor and said hello to the girls in the secretaries' well. We joked a bit. Howard came upstairs and asked me to join him in his office. Before I could get away, Laura, the head of the literary department and my immediate superior, asked me to see her first. We sat

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down in her office. "Clear out for a minute or two, Buzz," she said to her private secretary. Buzz together with Hilda had helped me get my job at the agency, and we were friends. She was a little old jumping bean of a gal, very smartly turned out. We used to talk about her son a lot. He was going with a San Bernadino policewoman. Buzz didn't like that, she was a union woman and didn't want any cops in the family. She used to ask me what I would do in her shoes and I'd tell her to let the policewoman give herself enough rope. Buzz mothered Laura, and she mothered me, and she mothered all the secretaries on the third floor, which sat well with everybody but the secretaries, who thought she was a slavedriver and made uncomplimentary remarks about her.

Pound for pound, Laura's office could have stood in for a Boston banker's. Cavernish, darkish, thick dull green carpet, heavy brown mahogany and teak paneling. I sat down across the small Louis Quatorze hand-carved desk from Laura. She jotted down a few notes from the meeting downstairs and said, "How do you feel now?" I said I felt fine. The buzzer made a noise. "Put him on," Laura said and nodded for me to pick up the extension phone. I crossed the carpet and listened in quietly. Laura was closing a deal with a New York producer for a musical play. The terms had all been agreed on and the producer was phoning to say that as far as he was concerned it was a deal.

Laura grinned over at me with triumphant pleasure. She didn't say it was a deal, she said, "Okay, let's rob each other." Then I put down the phone and went back to the desk. "Have you thought any more about what we talked about?" she said. A little, I said. She played with a small bronze Jo Davidsonish bust of Adlai Stevenson which she kept on her desk. "We're retrenching a little around here," she said, "but you can stay on if you want, you know." I know, I said. "We'll leave it like that," she said. She flicked the switch on her intercom, adjusted her gray slouch hat and said, "Okay, Buzz, let's start the slaughter." I got up and went into Buzz's office which led into mine. We winked at each other and she

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said I looked better. The buzzer was sounding in my office when I got in. "Hey, old boy," said Howard. I said okay, I would be in.

When I walked into Howard's office he got up and came around his desk and said heartily, "I want you to meet Vince Plodgett and his wife Leonie." To the Plodgetts he said, referring to me, "My colleague used to be a distance runner. He knows all about you and has spoken to me of your records."

Howard was a nice guy but he could spitball with the best of them, not with the suave geniality of the money boys downstairs but with his own special brand of quiet, tidy lies. I didn't know Plodgett from Adam. I shook hands with Plodgett and his nervous, pretty wife, telling them what a pleasure it was to meet them and had the Plodgetts, I asked, attended the recent NCAA decathlon elimination at the Coliseum, which was the way I guessed Howard wanted me to start in on Plodgett. One of the things you had to be in the agency was quick on the uptake so that when you walked into a room containing a client or a prospective client you gave the immediate impression of having for the past twenty-four hours been utterly absorbed in his welfare. Howard always said it was okay to do this because it was no skin off anybody's nose and made everyone feel good. When I first came to the agency I used to argue about it but then I saw his point. Right now, Plodgett was visibly preening because he thought I knew who he was, or had been, and he said no, he and his wife had been to a temperance convention in Omaha last week and had missed the Coliseum event. He didn't, he said, get as much chance as he would have liked to go to track meets, doing the Lord's work. I smiled with blank earnestness and remembered who he was. Vincent Plodgett, prewar Olympic 220-low hurdle, 440 and dash man who had been one of Rickenbacker's Tokyo raid boys, got shot down over Manchuria, spent half a thousand days in a prisoner-of-war camp, escaped, fought some more, took to drink, got saved by Billy Graham and had just written a book about himself.

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Howard said, "We've been fortunate enough to sign Mr. Plodgett to a representation contract. We were just talking about what price to put on *Mercury Fallen*." This was Plodgett's book. It had not been a best seller but hadn't done too badly, considering a literary market glutted with God, and when one or two of the film studios had put out feelers Howard had jumped in to wrap up rights. Howard sober, which was often, was quick on things like that. A representation contract meant that he had had to buck competition from other agencies; to get Plodgett to sign he had promised that we would sell him as a writer on the picture of his book. This was always untrue. The last thing producers wanted in their hair when they bought a book was to have the original author around, particularly corn-fed amateurs like Plodgett. At purchase time, if it ever was, things could become slightly unpleasant when the author found himself boxed out. After trying several formulas, Howard and I had agreed the one that worked best was to get tough and lay it on the line to the author, did he want a sale or not? They always came around. But first we all had to go through a song and dance.

Obviously Plodgett and Howard were new to each other because Plodgett was doing a lot of loud talking without including any of the facts of life. How he wanted only Gregory Peck to star, and Director So-and-so because he was a temperance man, and how he, Plodgett, had worked out a first-draft screenplay flashing back before titles to an incident in his father's life. Howard just stood there, with Mr. and Mrs. Plodgett in two easy chairs, nodding in his understanding, calm way. He was plastered. I didn't know how. At the meeting downstairs he had looked okay, and that had been only fifteen minutes ago. It was impossible but there it was. Not that Howard could be detected. He always did it with vodka, never slurred and never took liberties. You had to know Howard to tell.

Plodgett was going on, how much the book meant to him, how important it was to have a film made worthy of the theme of a man's regeneration, all that. I interrupted and

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asked Plodgett if a minimum price had been set on the book. He frowned.

"I'm not one of those who pretends money is nothing," he said, "but the spiritual aspects have to be looked at." I told Plodgett I was not one to lose sight of the spiritual aspects.

Mrs. Plodgett said something. "My husband," she said, "is extremely involved in the spiritual aspect of that book." She had the pronunciation of a five-and-dime salesgirl and was very pretty in a staring, thin way. I assured Mrs. Plodgett that the agency shared her reverence.

Several things struck me about the Plodgetts. He had the eyes of a fanatic, and she kept saying "spiritchool." We got around to talking about Plodgett's personal life. He said that his first "profound experience" had been in a solitary-confinement shack in Manchuria which he shared with a man who was now a sanitation engineer in Kenosha.

"Oh, and that's something I wanted to bring up," he said, "about Walter, the man in this Jap shack with me. It was one of those contraptions where you couldn't stand up or sit down. Hot. Also worms and Death Watch beetles in there. It seems he's making to sue me if I make this picture without getting his say-so." "How much will he settle for?" asked Howard. "Oh, he doesn't know," said Plodgett. "Oh yes he does," said Mrs. Plodgett. "Ten thousand dollars. I talked to him on the phone," she said.

"Well then," said Howard, "we'll simply tell the producer, whoever buys it, to cut out the solitary-confinement sequence."

"Oh, you can't do that," protested Mrs. Plodgett. "I'm afraid she's right there," assented Plodgett. "Like I said, that was my first profound experience and why no picture about me would make any sense at all without that put in it. No sir." Howard looked at me and we all talked about this man Walter from Kenosha for a while, and Howard promised to write and try to use reason. "Reason hmph," said Mrs. Plodgett. Mr. Plodgett went back to the spiritual aspects. How he had married the present Mrs. Plodgett when she

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was an heiress in Texas, had gone off to war, and when he'd come back started beating up on her.

"He used to beat me terribly, didn't you, Vincent?" said Mrs. Plodgett. "Yes I did," said Plodgett heartily. "I was just plain no good. Drank like a fish. Three, often four quarts a day. Leonie over there paid, I didn't do a stitch of work for two years, and when she wouldn't buy my drinks why I'd just whup her."

"Yes," said Mrs. Plodgett.

He went on some more, describing the spiritual aspects of his past, how he stumbled into a tabernacle and heard Billy Graham for the first time, how he went back home and smashed all the whiskey bottles until his hands bled and then searched through the city until he found Billy Graham in his hotel room. "Right there in that hotel room Mr. Graham and I knelt to pray and I took the pledge. I grabbed hold of Mr. Graham's lapels so hard I got blood all over his suit, but he didn't seem to mind a single bit. Now I go all over the country giving talks against drink. I got a dull response with my first talk. I tacked on a new ending and now they pat me on the back and... don't give me whiskey for Christmas presents."

Howard and I laughed politely. I started to ask Plodgett what new ending he had tacked on to his talk, I get interested in such matters, but Howard cut me short. I had performed my function of letting the client know that more than one agent in the office was interested in him. I left Howard's office as the Plodgetts were beginning to ask some surprisingly astute questions about motion picture studios.

When I got back to my office I found a list of phone calls I was supposed to make back to people who had called me. I settled down to it. The first was a writer, Cullen Pope, who shouted, "I've been waiting a month and a half to tell you I'm leaving the agency, honey, unless you find me a job in seven—s-e-v-e-n days." I told him to cool off, it was a slack period. I didn't much like Cullen and I didn't much like going out to find him work, but I had brought him to the agency, in fact he was my first big catch and I felt a responsibility.

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But it didn't make me like him any the more. The second call was to a producer married to the star we had discussed at the downstairs meeting whose face had been lifted. The producer wanted me to find a story for her.

"Get me a story," he demanded, "where this guy walks in and slaps the shit out of her in the first scene but we don't know why. See?" The third call was to an old friend of mine, Louis, who was back on a studio shooting floor after eighteen months at chino minimum-security for trying to solve it in the early mornings by stealing cars he didn't need. I liked Louis and his wife. We had been to college together. Now, courtesy of a psychiatric parole, he has a "grip" at the studio where he had once been an assistant director. It was Louis' idea of "how to fight back." He was writing an article, on commission, about what it was like, for the *Readers' Digest*. Alvin had submitted a western screenplay to me some time ago. He urged me over the phone to sell it hard. "I know it isn't quality," Louis said, "but I want you to go overboard for this. It's important to me. You know as well as I that it's enthusiasm that counts."

The fourth call was to a novelist whom I had taken out to the night clubs last month, on Laura's orders, when he came out on a $1500-per-week job. We'd gotten drunk and he'd told me all about his childhood in Iowa, and when he got out of the taxi he'd fallen flat on his face and getting up said, "You must detest my work." I said I did. Now we were talking long-distance and from New York he wanted to know when he could be coming back to Hollywood for a job. The fifth call was to a director at Paramount who had come over to my apartment a couple of weeks ago to ask my advice on whether he should do an anti-Red story the studio wanted him to do. He was a House Committee testifier, including the name of the first man to give him a job in Hollywood. Up at my place he had told me he wasn't so much worried about the anti-Red angle but there was a Mexican kid in the story and he wanted to know would the agency back him up if he shot a story which also included anti-discrimination. Now he was merely asking after my health. I

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made a few more calls and then went into Laura's office for a talk. She and Stanley, the head of the television department, who owed me $33 which Howard said I would never see, were hiding in her office, with the blinds down, and peeking out the windows dodging a rival agent who was coming over to settle a four-way hassle with NBC. It was a delicate situation and would remain so until somebody's lie proved weakest. Laura and Stanley were skulking around, signaling to someone outside on the Boulevard. Buzz told me they were barred to all visitors, especially the rival agent, who was representing NBC. It was a little complicated because he had once worked for the Benedict agency and knew Laura's style. Nobody had much time for me, they were still crouching around and lifting the blinds and making hand signals, so I told Buzz to tell Laura to let me know when she was free.

Christopher, the Negro handyman who had been working for the agency for eleven years and made $58 a week, was in my office, amiably mopping about with a broom handle. He had once been an athlete but was beerbellied now. Once, I used to try to get him to join NAACP, but we never talked about much now except jazz. Christopher had a dream of forming his own combo. He hung out a lot around Joel and Andy's garage across the street. We schmoozed around, and then a client burst in from the corridor. I hated that but there was nothing much I could do. Christopher gave me a big daddy-o wink behind the client's back and dozy-doed out.

This client was a big-money woman—$2000 a week on a guarantee—with whom I had a relationship of sorts. The bohemian daughter of a lumber town baron, she was now commercial, pinched. I made my first reputation in the agency by bringing her back to the fold after she strayed. I did it mainly by talking Thackeray with her. It was just that she was temporarily sick of illiterates. I am not outstandingly literate, but Thackeray was "my" man at college. The office believed I had saved her for us by spitballing and I never disenlightened them. Her name was Amanda Schorr. She

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had a reputation because she had worked on expensive pictures and because of her money. But she was always in trouble because she was such a slow, unimaginative worker, and we usually had difficulty finding her a job but we always did because, in the last resort, a producer knew that any script done by Amanda would hang together.

She was in a good mood. She was working, at an independent, true, but working. She had with her a tall broad-chested young man with a blunt *sabra* face whom I recognized as a New York writer brought out to do the latest Jimmy Dean but who had been switched over, after the crash, to a Sal Mineo. I had tried to get him with a $750-per offer but MCA lapped me with this Dean story for twice the figure. Amanda suggested we all go to lunch. I made two more phone calls, one to another agent to warn him that the client he was romancing had another five years to go on his contract with me and he, the agent, would be working for nothing, the other to a producer at Allied Artists to say that the author refused to climb down on price, which was embroidering it only somewhat.

I ducked my head in Buzz's office and asked if Laura was free. Buzz said, "They're still in there playing cowboy and Indian." I said what I had could wait.

We went down in Amanda's car, a modest little Oldsmobile Eight with electronically operated everything, but had to drop the New York writer off for a psychiatrist's appointment. On the way we had been talking about the tattoos on the writer's wrists. I recognized them as pachuco gang marks, and the writer had said yes, he had had himself tattooed in order that he might share a deeper empathy with the boys in his script. Even so, he wasn't half bad, that writer, and I was sorry he wasn't joining us.

We lunched at Gingirelli's on Hollywood Boulevard. I had liver and onions, Amanda ordered some special soup, some special toast, and a weird salad. She was a finicky eater. What she really had invited me out for was to read a novel for her and backstop her judgment on whether to buy it. Like many Hollywood writers, she had run out of ideas and was

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now in the business of buying books to adapt. We talked about the novel, and then she talked about how she got started in pictures. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, a famous director, then a newly commissioned colonel, had come all the way out from Washington to get her into an Army film unit on the basis of the one and only novel Amanda had ever written. The Colonel had then promptly forgotten Amanda but Amanda said she learned a lot from the Colonel doing menial jobs on location for a documentary about treatment of combat fatigue. I had seen the film in college. It was the best, least compromising film the Colonel made, then or since. I am told the War Department has refused issuance to civilians. Amanda spoke at considerable length about her respect for the Colonel, "who taught me to revere life," about her compassion for mental patients, about the pitiable state of mind of the crew shooting the picture. In the middle of her telling me how much she loved the Colonel and the ordinary man, the waiter came by with the wrong salad and Amanda screeched out of her seat. "You stupid man! That's the second time you made the same mistake!" When the waiter went away, Amanda told me how much she pitied the Digger Indians of California, about whom no film had ever been written. Amanda said she was dreaming up one now.

After lunch I went back to the office by taxi. All along Hollywood Boulevard there were big signs in drugstore windows: WE HAVE MILTOWN. I asked the driver if he'd made his nut for the day and he glared at me as if I were from the vice squad. Except for the secretaries, the office was completely empty when I returned. The agents were all making their rounds. Buzz told me that Laura and Stanley were off somewhere and Laura wouldn't be back until later... I talked with Lucy, leaning my elbows on her desk. Then I gave her the day off. She didn't want the day off and gave me a peculiar look but I told her to take it anyway. Then I went and locked myself in my office. It was quiet, with the blinds drawn and everyone but me on their rounds.

I sat for quite a time, thinking about things. Then I picked

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up the phone and asked Estelle to give me a line to Oscar Bush, the story editor at Worldwide Studios. As soon as he got on he started spieling, which was what he always did with agents to get them off balance. Oscar lived with two uncles and took kickbacks from writers he hired and, unlike story editors elsewhere, was an important man on the lot. "Y'know, this play, *The Bad Seed*," he said over the phone. "Never'll make a movie. Why not, let me tell you why not. Because the people in the small towns will throw rocks at it. You cannot attack the sanctity of the home and get away with it. And the same goes for the story you tried to sell me—" Oscar, I said.

"Yes, what is it?" he replied.

Oscar, if I see you again I'm going to knock the crap right out of you. I hung up. I must have had a smile on my face for the next ten minutes.

Next I pulled out a piece of paper and carefully wrote down a list of people I wanted to say goodbye to in Hollywood. I gave the list to one of the girls outside and asked her to keep the calls coming. There weren't many. Just a few special people. A censor over at M-G-M, the story editor at Warner's, a secretary who'd worked at Republic for eighteen years and whose name really *was* Jane Doe, a studio guard at Hal Roach, a feisty old woman reader at Columbia, a gentle agent at Famous Artists, the head waitress at the Universal commissary, the assistant story editor at the same lot and an actor at Fox. The people who had been nice to me. Just as I got through with the calls, I could hear the agents, one after another, tumbling back into the office, slumped (I knew) exhausted, fiercely figuring. Several people tried my doors but I had them locked. I sat back and thought some more. I smiled off and on, like a neon sign, and I couldn't seem to stop it. I sat and thought. Then I reached out and placed both hands, palms down, on the double row of interoffice buzzers stapled to my wall. I picked up the intercom and listened to the agents in the other offices say "Hello? Hello," a score of querulous, fatigued, wondering voices skimming into each other. I used to do that sometimes when I was bored. I listened

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to the agents say hello to each other and then put down the intercom to carefully make out another list. I had to think about this one. I wanted to remember all the women I had slept with in the past six months or so. After I made out the list, I put the phone on "private" and dialed the numbers myself.

Then I called a few more numbers, the secretary of the Citizens' Committee to Preserve American Freedoms, on whose board I occasionally sat; Alain, a kindly young homosexual tart who was an "inker-in" for Walt Disney; an old friend at North American Aircraft; a French horn player I hadn't seen in about a year; Gorman, my agent protégé, and some poker buddies. They weren't all in and where I could I left messages. When I went out into the outer office-well it was loud and busy, all the agents on the phone or dictating memos. I walked all the way back to Howard's office. Howard broached this idea once again, his pet idea of a burial ground at sea. He had been a PBY pilot in the war and he couldn't get it out of his head that millions were to be made because many people, he felt, wanted to be buried at sea. I told Howard I was clearing out and he said he was sorry to be hearing it. We shook hands. I went out and into Laura's office. Buzz called through and said Laura might be held up at NBC until six or seven. I didn't feel like waiting that long, so I wrote a note and left it on her desk. Then I went into my office, collected a few of my things and went down to my car.

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ADRIENNE RICH

END OF AN ERA

This morning, flakes of sun
peel down to the last snowholds,
the barbed-wire leavings of a war
lost, won, in these dead-end alleys.
Stale as a written-out journalist,
I start to sort my gear.
Nothing is happening. City, dumb
as a pack of thumbed cards, you
once had snap and glare
and secret life; now, trembling
under my five grey senses' weight,
you fall and flatten
queasily on the table.

Baudelaire, I think of you! Nothing changes,
rude and self-absorbed the current
dashes past, asking nothing, poetry
extends its unsought amnesty,
autumn saws the great grove down.
Some voices, though, shake in the air like heat.

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I see myself hardened against queer sights:
myself, perhaps, the queerest,
man running wild
in his selfmade wilderness.
Everyone greets me; all are nonchalant.
We have so much
in common: even squalor.
I walk into my house and see
tourists fingering this and that.
My mirrors, my portfolios
don't suit their style.

Still, those few friends,
living and dead,
with whom things aren't too easy...
Certain old woods are sawdust,
from now on have to be described?
Nothing changes. The bones of the mammoths
are still in the earth.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

JOHN MAYDEW, OR THE ALLOTMENT

Ranges
of clinker heaps
go orange now:
through cooler air
an acrid drift
seeps upwards
from the valley mills;
the spoiled and staled
distances invade
these closer comities
of vegetable shade,
glass-houses, rows
and trellises of red-
ly flowering beans.
This
is a paradise
where you may smell
the cinders
of quotidian hell beneath you;
here grow
their green reprieves
for those
who labour, linger in
their watch-chained waistcoats
rolled-back sleeves—
the ineradicable
peasant in the dispossessed
and half-tamed Englishman.
By day, he makes
a burrow of necessity

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from which
at evening, he emerges
here.
A thoughtful yet unthinking man,
John Maydew,
memory stagnates
in you and breeds
a bitterness; it grew
and rooted in your silence
from the day
you came
unwitting out of war
in all the pride
of ribbons and a scar
to forty years
of mean amends...
He squats
within his shadow
and a toad
that takes
into a slack and twitching jaw
the worms he proffers it,
looks up at him
through eyes that are
as dimly faithless
as the going years.
For, once returned
he found that he
must choose between
an England, profitlessly green

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and this—
a seamed and lunar grey
where slag in lavafolds
unrolls beneath him.
The valley gazes up
through kindling eyes
as, unregarded at his back
its hollows deepen
with the black, extending shadows
and the sounds of day
explore its coming cavities,
the night's
refreshed recesses.
Tomorrow
he must feed its will,
his interrupted pastoral
take heart into
those close
and gritty certainties that lie
a glowing ruse
all washed in hesitations now.
He eyes the toad
beating
in the assuagement
of his truce.

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JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

THE PEACOCK AND THE SNAKE

"It was your fault! It was your fault!" cried the Peacock.
"And it was yours too," whispered the Snake.

"It was lust! It was lust!" shouted the Peacock.
"Yes, and pride, and vanity" — so the Snake.

"I loved him! I loved him!" shrieked the Peacock.
"And she was sweet, sweet," hissed the Snake.

"I look at my feet and I scream" — the Peacock.
"And I have no feet" — the Snake.

"It was your fault!" "Yours also, perhaps?" — thus the
Peacock-Angel
And the diabolical Snake, down in the filthiest pothole,

Where they exist, reproached each other,
Timeless in their torment. But somewhere

Within the innocent jungle the peacock (which is a bird)
Displays beneath the bough a fragment of God's splendour;

And the coiled snake (which is a reptile)
Deployed upon the ground a portion of His subtlety.

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who would advise me about budgeting and not letting friends make long-distance calls on my wire. But all that was normal; it was happening to everybody and nobody could feel it as a profound or permanent change, for it was like the life of a college student prolonged; middle-class college students always overspent their allowances and ran up bills that scared them because they couldn't pay. The thirties proper, which I was inducted into in about 1936, were something harsher. They were Armageddon. This panel itself, in a way, is rather thirtyish. The idea behind it is that we (or you) are sitting in judgment on a period of history. The thirties are being presented as a choice. Are you for them or against them, and as you answer, so will you be defined. The rhetorical form that best expresses the thirties is the debate. Today, perhaps, it is the panel, which recognizes the possibility of shades of opinion; in the thirties, the meetings of this sort that I remember featured only a pair of antagonists. People used to tell about a debate, so called, at the University of Chicago, when President Hutchins represented Aristotle, Mortimer Adler represented Aquinas, and a student wearing a dunce-cap (yes, literally) represented Hume. Thus the debate shaded into the trial, and in the thirties the weaker member of a pair of debaters found himself, always, on trial. This state of war, of incessant belligerency, was not confined to politics. It infected literature, education, psychistry, art. The word, reconciliation, which was so often used at that time, testifies to the state of belligerency. Certain mediators were always trying to "reconcile" Freud with Marx, as well as, a little later, they tried to reconcile Freud with religion. A common form of speech was "How do you reconcile what you say with---?" In practice, there were were some very strange reconciliations. The tiara at the Waldorf strike; the gold evening dress to go to Madrid in the Spanish Civil War. Those women were trying to reconcile the twenties (fun) with the thirties. There was a strong affinity (unconscious) in the thirties for the absurd. Looking back, people remember grotesque and unbelievable events, events that flew, as they say, in the face of Nature. But I will come back to that in a minute.

The thirties are presented now, nostalgically, as a time of freedom. Not so.

Facsimile of a McCarthy manuscript page

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—*Hans Beck*

THE ART OF FICTION XXVII

MARY McCARTHY

The interview took place in the living-room of the apartment in Paris where Miss McCarthy was staying during the winter of 1961. It was a sunny, pleasant room, not too large, with long windows facing south toward the new buildings going up along the Avenue Montaigne. A dining-*cum*-writing table stood in an alcove at one end; on it was a lamp, some books and papers, and a rather well-worn portable typewriter. At the other end of the room were several armchairs and a low sofa where Miss McCarthy sat while the interview was recorded. On this early spring afternoon (it was March 16), the windows were open wide, letting in a warm breeze and the noise of construction work nearby. An enormous pink azalea bloomed on the balcony, and roses graced a small desk in one corner.

Miss McCarthy settled down on the sofa and served coffee. She was wearing a simple beige dress with little jewelry—a large and rather ornate ring was her one elaborate ornament.

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She is of medium height, dark, with straight hair combed back from a center part into a knot at the nape of her neck; this simple coiffure sets off a profile of beautiful, almost classic regularity. Her smile is a generous one, flashing suddenly across her face, crinkling up her widely-set eyes. She speaks not quickly, but with great animation and energy, gesturing seldom, and then only with a slight casual motion of her wrists and hands. Her sentences are vigorously punctuated with emphatic verbal stresses and short though equally emphatic pauses. In general, she impresses one as a woman who combines a certain gracefulness and charm with positively robust and somewhat tense assurance: it is typical of her that she matches the tremendously elegant carriage of her arms and neck and handsomely poised head with a deliberate, almost jerky motion in the taking of a step.

While Miss McCarthy's conversation was remarkably fluent and articulate, she would nevertheless often interrupt herself, with a kind of nervous carefulness, in order to reword or qualify a phrase, sometimes even impatiently destroying it and starting again in the effort to express herself as exactly as possible. Several times during the interview she seized upon a question in such a way that one felt she had decided upon certain things she wanted to say about herself and would willy-nilly create the opportunity to do so. At other moments, some of them hilarious—her gifts for pitiless and comic witticism are justifiably celebrated—she would indulge in unpremeditated extravagances of description or speculation that she would then laughingly censor as soon as the words were out of her mouth. She was extremely generous in the matter of silly or badly worded questions, turning them into manageable ones by the nature of her response. In all, her conversation was marked by a scrupulous effort to be absolutely fair and honest, and by a kind of natural and exuberant enjoyment of her own intellectual powers.

In addition to four novels and a book of short stories, Mary McCarthy has published two books about Italy, a collection of theater criticism, a volume of critical essays, and *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. Her articles appear in a

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number of journals and magazines, both in America and in Europe.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like writing in Europe?

MCCARTHY

I don't really find much difference. I think if you stayed here very long, you'd begin to notice a little difficulty about language.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write about Europe when you first came here after the war?

MCCARTHY

Only in that short story, "The Cicerone." That was in the summer of 1946. We were just about the only tourists because you weren't allowed to travel unless you had an official reason for it. I got a magazine to give me some sort of *carnet*.

INTERVIEWER

Did the old problem, the American in Europe, interest you as a novelist?

MCCARTHY

I suppose at that time, at least in that story somewhat, it did. But no, not further. For one thing, I don't know whether I cease to feel so much like an American or what: New York is, after all, so Europeanized, and so many of one's friends are European that the distinction between you as an American and the European blurs. Also Europe has become so much more Americanized. No, I no longer see that Jamesian distinction. I mean, I see it in James, and I could see it even in 1946, but I don't see it any more. I don't feel any more this antithesis of Young America, Old Europe. I think that's really gone. For better or worse, I'm not sure. Maybe for worse.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the novel you're writing while you're here—have you been working on it a long time?

MCCARTHY

Oh years! Let me think, I began it around the time of the first Stevenson campaign. Then I abandoned it and wrote the books on Italy, and *A Charmed Life*, and *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. When did I begin this thing again? A year ago last spring, I guess. Part of it came out in *Partisan Review*. The one called "Dotty Makes an Honest Woman of Herself."

INTERVIEWER

Is it unfair to ask you what it will be about?

MCCARTHY

No, it's very easy. It's called *The Group*, and it's about eight Vassar girls. It starts with the inauguration of Roosevelt, and —well, at first it was going to carry them up to the present time, but then I decided to stop at the inauguration of Eisenhower. It was conceived as a kind of mock-chronicle novel. It's a novel about the idea of progress, really. The idea of progress seen in the female sphere, the feminine sphere. You know, home economics, architecture, domestic technology, contraception, child-bearing; the study of technology in the home, in the play-pen, in the bed. It's supposed to be the history of the loss of faith in progress, in the idea of progress, during that twenty-year period.

INTERVIEWER

Are these eight Vassar girls patterned more or less after ones you knew when you were there in college?

MCCARTHY

Some of them are drawn pretty much from life, and some of them are rather composite. I've tried to keep myself out of this book. Oh, and all their mothers are in it. That's the part I almost like the best.

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INTERVIEWER

Just the mothers, not the fathers?

MCCARTHY

Not the fathers. The fathers vaguely figure, offstage and so on, but the mothers are really monumentally present!

INTERVIEWER

Does it matter to you at all where you write?

MCCARTHY

Oh, a nice peaceful place with some good light.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work regularly, every morning, say?

MCCARTHY

Normally; right now I haven't been. Normally I work from about nine to two, and sometimes much longer—if it's going well, sometimes from nine to seven.

INTERVIEWER

Typewriter?

MCCARTHY

Typewriter, yes. This always has to get into a *Paris Review* interview! I very rarely go out to lunch. That's a rule. I've been accepting lunch dates recently—*why* didn't I remember that? My excuse—the excuse I've been forgetting—is simply that I don't go out to lunch! And in general, I don't. That was the best rule I ever made.

INTERVIEWER

Once you've published part of a novel separately, in a magazine or short story collection, do you do much work on it afterwards, before it is published in the novel itself?

MCCARTHY

It depends. With this novel, I have.

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INTERVIEWER

Speaking not of a novel, but of your autobiography, I remember that you published parts of *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* as one section in *Cast a Cold Eye*. You changed the story about your nickname a great deal, reducing it to just a small incident in *Catholic Girlhood*.

MCCARTHY

I couldn't *bear* that one! It had appeared years ago in *Mademoiselle*, and when I put it in *Cast a Cold Eye*, I didn't realize how much I disliked it. When I came to put *Catholic Girlhood* together, I simply couldn't stand it, and when I was reading the book in proof, I decided to tear it out, to reduce it to a tiny tiny incident. As it stood, it was just impossible, much too rhetorical.

INTERVIEWER

When you publish chapters of a book separately on their own, do you think of them as chapters, or as independent short stories?

MCCARTHY

As chapters, but if somebody, a magazine editor, thought they were what *Partisan Review* calls a "self-contained chapter," all right, but I've never tried to make them into separate units. If one happens to be, all right—if they want to publish it as such. The *New Yorker* has given me surprises: they've printed things that I would never have thought could stand by themselves. But *they* thought so.

INTERVIEWER

Did you, when you saw them in print?

MCCARTHY

Surprisingly, yes.

INTERVIEWER

What about in your first novel, *The Company She Keeps*?

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MCCARTHY

Those chapters were written originally as short stories. About half-way through, I began to think of them as a kind of unified story. The same character kept reappearing, and so on. I decided finally to call it a novel, in that it does in a sense tell *a* story, one story. But the first chapters were written without any idea of there being a novel. It was when I was doing the one about the Yale man that I decided to put the heroine of the earlier stories in that story too. The story of the Yale man is not a bit autobiographical, but the heroine appears anyway, in order to make a unity for the book.

INTERVIEWER

Were you also interested simply in the problem of writing one story from various different points of view, in experimenting with the different voices?

MCCARTHY

There were no voices in that. I don't think I was really very much interested in the technical side of it. It was the first piece of fiction I had ever written, I mean I'd never made any experiments before. I was too inexperienced to worry about technical problems.

INTERVIEWER

You hadn't written any fiction before then?

MCCARTHY

No. Well, in college I had written the tiniest amount of fiction: very bad short stories, very unrealized short stories, for courses, and that was all. I once started a detective story to make money—but I couldn't get the murder to take place! At the end of three chapters I was still describing the characters and the milieu, so I thought, this is not going to work. No corpse! And that was all. Then I simply did *The Company She Keeps*, and was only interested in the technical side from the point of view of establishing the truth, of trying to recreate what happened. For instance, the art gallery story was

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written in the first person because that's the way you write that kind of story—a study of a curious individual.

INTERVIEWER

You imply that most of the stories were distinctly autobiographical.

MCCARTHY

They all are more or less, except the one about the Yale man.

INTERVIEWER

Is this distinction between autobiography and fiction clear in your mind before you begin writing a story, or does it become so as you write? Or is there no such distinction?

MCCARTHY

Well, I think it depends on what you're doing. Let's be frank. Take "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt": in that case it was an attempt to describe something that really happened—though naturally you have to do a bit of name-changing and city-changing. And the first story, the one about the divorce: that was a stylization—there were no proper names in it or anything—but still, it was an attempt to be as exact as possible about something that had happened. The Yale Man was based on a real person. John Chamberlain, actually, whom I didn't know very well. But there it was an attempt to make this real man a broad type. You know, to use John Chamberlain's boyish looks and a few of the features of his career, and then draw all sorts of other Yale men into it. Then the heroine was put in, in an imaginary love affair, which *had* to be because she had to be in the story. I always thought that was all very hard on John Chamberlain, who was married. But of course he knew it wasn't true, and he knew that I didn't know him very well, and that therefore in the story he was just a kind of good-looking clothes-hanger. Anything else that I've written later—I may make a mistake—has been on the whole a fiction. Though it may have auto-

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biographical elements in it that I'm conscious of, it has been conceived as a fiction, even a thing like *The Oasis*, that's supposed to have all these real people in it. The whole story is a complete fiction. Nothing of the kind ever happened; after all, it happens in the future. But in general, with characters, I do try at least to be as exact as possible about the essence of a person, to find the key that works the person both in real life and in the fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Do you object to people playing the *roman à clef* game with your novels?

MCCARTHY

I suppose I really ask for it, in a way. I *do* rather object to it at the same time, insofar as it deflects attention from what I'm trying to do in the novel. What I really do is take real plums and put them in an imaginary cake. If you're interested in the cake, you get rather annoyed with people saying what species the real plum was. In *The Groves of Academe*, for instance. I had taught at Bard College and at Sarah Lawrence, but I didn't want to make a composite of those two places: I really wanted to make a weird imaginary college of my own. I even took a trip to the Mennonite country in Pennsylvania to try to find a perfect location for it, which I found —now where was it? Somewhere near Ephrata—yes, it was Lititz, Pennsylvania, the home of the pretzel. There's a very charming old-fashioned sort of academy, a girls' college there—I'd never heard of it before and can't remember the name. It had the perfect setting, I thought, for this imaginary college of mine. Anyway, I would get terribly annoyed if people said it had to do with Sarah Lawrence, which it had almost no resemblance to. It was quite a bit like Bard. Sarah Lawrence is a much more *borné* and dull place than Bard, or than my college. And of course I was even more annoyed if they said it was Bennington. There was not supposed to be anything there of Bennington at all!

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INTERVIEWER

When were you at Bard?

MCCARTHY

'45 to '46.

INTERVIEWER

And at Sarah Lawrence?

MCCARTHY

I was there just for one term, the winter of '48.

INTERVIEWER

Did you enjoy teaching?

MCCARTHY

I adored teaching at Bard, yes. But the students were so poor at Sarah Lawrence that I didn't much enjoy it there. I don't think anyone I knew who was teaching there then did. But at Bard it was very exciting. It was all quite mad, crazy. I had never taught before, and I was staying up till two in the morning every night trying to keep a little bit behind my class. Joke.

INTERVIEWER

Did they ask you to teach "Creative Writing"?

MCCARTHY

I've always refused to teach creative writing. Oh, I had in addition to two courses, about seven or eight tutorials, and some of those tutees wanted to study creative writing. I think I finally weakened and let one boy who was utterly ungifted for it study creative writing because he was so incapable of studying anything else.

INTERVIEWER

But mostly it was these two courses.

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MCCARTHY

Yes, and then you had to keep up with all these students. I had one boy doing all the works of James T. Farrell and a girl who was studying Marcus Aurelius and Dante. That was fun. That one I did the work for. And one girl was doing a thesis on Richardson: that was just hopeless. I mean, I couldn't even try to keep up with teaching Russian novels, and, say, Jane Austen—who in my course came under the head of "Modern Novel"—*and* all the works of Richardson. So I could never tell, you know, whether she had read what she was supposed to have read, because I couldn't remember it! Everything was reversed! The student was in a position to see whether the professor was cheating, or had done her homework. Anyway, everybody ended up ill after this year—you know, various physical ailments. But it was exciting, it was fun. The students were fun. The bright ones were bright, and there wasn't much of a middle layer. They were either bright or they were just cretins. I must say, there are times when you welcome a B-student.

I liked teaching because I loved this business of studying. I found it quite impossible to give a course unless I'd read the material the night before. I absolutely couldn't handle the material unless it was fresh in my mind. Unless you give canned lectures, it really has to be—though that leads, I think, to all sorts of very whimsical, perhaps, and capricious interpretations: that is, you see the whole book, say *Anna Karenina*, in terms that are perhaps dictated by the moment. One wonders afterwards whether one's interpretation of *Anna Karenina* that one had rammed down the throats of those poor students was really as true as it seemed to one at the time.

INTERVIEWER

Which books did you teach in the "Modern Novel"?

MCCARTHY

Well, you had to call everything at Bard either modern or contemporary, or the students wouldn't register for it.

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Everyone thinks this a joke, but it was true. I originally was going to teach a whole course on critical theory, from Aristotle to T. S. Eliot or something, and only three students registered for it, but if it had been called "Contemporary Criticism," then I think we would have had a regular class. So we called this course "The Modern Novel," and it began with Jane Austen, I think, and went up, well, certainly to Henry James. That was when I taught novels in pairs. I taught *Emma* and *Madame Bovary* together. Then *The Princess Cassimassima*, with the anarchist plot in it and everything, with *The Possessed*. *The Red and the Black* with *Great Expectations*. And *Fontamara* with something. I only taught novels I liked.

INTERVIEWER

Would it be roughly the same list, were you teaching the course now? Or do you have new favorites?

MCCARTHY

Oh I don't know, I might even add something like *Doctor Zhivago* at the end. I would probably do some different Dickens. I've read an awful lot of Dickens over again since then. Now I think I'd teach *Our Mutual Friend* or *Little Dorritt*.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you start reading Dickens over again?

MCCARTHY

I don't know, I got interested in Dickens at Bard, and then at Sarah Lawrence. Another stimulus was a book done by a man called Edgar Johnson, a biographer of Dickens. Anthony West had attacked it in the *New Yorker*, and this made me so angry that I reviewed the book, and that set off another kind of chain reaction. I really *passionately* admire Dickens.

INTERVIEWER

Could I go back for a moment to what you said about your early writing at college? I think you said that *The Company*

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She Keeps was the first fiction you ever wrote, but that was some years after you left Vassar, wasn't it?

MCCARTHY

Oh yes. You know, I had been terribly discouraged when I was at Vassar, and later, by being told that I was really a critical mind, and that I had no creative talent. Who knows? they may have been right. This was done in a generous spirit, I don't mean that it was harsh. Anyway, I hadn't found any way at all, when I was in college, of expressing anything in the form of short stories. We had a rebel literary magazine that Elizabeth Bishop and Eleanor Clark were on, and Muriel Rukeyser and I. I wrote, not fiction, but sort of strange things for this publication.

INTERVIEWER

A rebel magazine?

MCCARTHY

There was an official literary magazine, which we were all against. Our magazine was anonymous. It was called *Con Spirito*. It caused a great sort of scandal. I don't know why—it was one of these perfectly innocent undertakings. But people said, "How awful, it's anonymous." The idea of anonymity was of course to keep the judgment clear, especially the editorial board's judgment—to make people read these things absolutely on their merits. Well anyway, *Con Spirito* lasted for only a few numbers. Elizabeth Bishop wrote a wonderful story for it which I still remember called "Then Came the Poor." It was about a revolution, a fantasy that took place in modern bourgeois society, when the poor invade, and take over a house.

INTERVIEWER

When you left Vassar, what then?

MCCARTHY

Well, I went to New York, and I began reviewing for the *New Republic* and the *Nation*—right away. I wrote these little

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book reviews. Then there was a series about the critics. The *Nation* wanted a large-scale attack on critics and book-reviewers, chiefly those in the *Herald Tribune*, the *Times*, and the *Saturday Review*, and so on. I had been doing some rather harsh reviews, so they chose me as the person to do this. But I was so young, I think I was twenty-two, that they didn't *trust* me. So they got Margaret Marshall, who was the assistant literary editor then, to do it with me: actually we divided the work up and did separate pieces. But she was older and was supposed to be—I don't know—a restraining influence on me: anyway, someone more responsible. That series was a great sensation at the time, and it made people very mad. I continued just to do book reviews, maybe one other piece about the theater, something like the one on the literary critics. And then nothing more until *Partisan Review* started. That was when I tried to write the detective story—before *Partisan Review*. To be exact, *Partisan Review* had existed as a Stalinist magazine, and then it had died, gone to limbo. But after the Moscow trials, the PR boys, Rahv and Phillips, revived it, got a backer, merged with some other people—Dwight Macdonald and others—and started it again. As an anti-Stalinist magazine. I had been married to an actor, and was supposed to know something about the theater, so I began writing a theater column for them. I didn't have any other ambitions at all. Then I married Edmund Wilson, and after we'd been married about a week, he said, "I think you have a talent for writing fiction." And he put me in a little room. He didn't literally lock the door, but he said, "Stay in there!" And I did. I just sat down, and it just came. It was the first story I had ever written, really: the first story in *The Company She Keeps*. Robert Penn Warren published it in the *Southern Review*. And I found myself writing fiction to my great surprise.

INTERVIEWER

This was when you became involved in politics, wasn't it?

MCCARTHY

No. Earlier. In 1936, at the time of the Moscow trials. That

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changed absolutely everything. I got swept into the whole Trotskyite movement. But by accident. I was at a party. I knew Jim Farrell—I'd reviewed one of his books, I think it was *Studs Lonigan*—in any case, I knew Jim Farrell, and I was asked to a party given by his publisher for Art Young, the old *Masses* cartoonist. There were a lot of Communists at this party. Anyway, Farrell went around asking people whether they thought Trotsky was entitled to a hearing and to the right of asylum. I said yes, and that was all. The next thing I discovered I was on the letterhead of something calling itself the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky. I was furious, of course, at this use of my name. Not that my name had any consequence, but still, it was mine. Just as I was about to make some sort of protest, I began to get all sorts of calls from Stalinists, telling me to get off the committee. I began to see that other people were falling off the committee, like Freda Kirchwey—she was the first to go, I think—and this cowardice impressed me so unfavorably that naturally I didn't say anything about my name having got on there by accident, or at least without my realizing. So I stayed. I began to know all the people on the committee. We'd attend meetings. It was a completely different world. Serious, you know. Anyway, that's how I got to know the PR boys. They hadn't yet revived the *Partisan Review*, but they were both on the Trotsky committee, at least Philip was. We—the committee, that is—used to meet in Farrell's apartment. I remember once when we met on St. Valentine's Day and I thought, Oh, this is so strange, because I'm the only person in this room who realizes that it's Valentine's Day. It was true! I had a lot of rather rich Stalinist friends, and I was always on the defensive with them, about the Moscow Trial question, Trotsky, and so on. So I had to inform myself, really, in order to conduct the argument. I found that I was reading more and more, getting more and more involved in this business. At the same time I got a job at Covici Friede, a rather left-wing publishing house now out of business, also full of Stalinists. I began to see Philip Rahv again because Covici Friede needed some readers' opinions on Russian

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books, and I remembered that he read Russian, so he came around to the office, and we began to see each other. When *Partisan Review* was revived I appeared as a sort of fifth wheel —there may have been more than that—but in any case as a kind of appendage of *Partisan Review*.

INTERVIEWER

Then you hadn't really been interested in politics before the Moscow trials?

MCCARTHY

No, not really. My first husband had worked at the Theater Union, which was a radical group downtown that put on proletarian plays, and there were lots of Communists in that. Very few Socialists. And so I knew all these people; I knew that kind of person. But I wasn't very sympathetic to them. We used to see each other, and there were a lot of jokes. I even marched in May Day parades. Things like that. But it was all... fun. It was all done in that spirit. And I remained, as the *Partisan Review* boys said, absolutely bourgeois throughout. They always said to me very sternly, "You're really a throwback. You're really a Twenties figure."

INTERVIEWER

How did you react to that?

MCCARTHY

Well, I suppose I was wounded. I was a sort of gay, good-time girl, from their point of view. And they were men of the Thirties. Very serious. That's why my position was so insecure on *Partisan Review;* it wasn't exactly insecure, but... lowly. I mean, in *fact*. And that was why they let me write about the theater, because they thought the theater was of absolutely no consequence.

INTERVIEWER

How did the outbreak of the war affect your political opinion? The *Partisan Review* group split apart, didn't it?

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MCCARTHY

At the beginning of the war we were all isolationists, the whole group. Then I think the summer after the fall of France—certainly before Pearl Harbor—Philip Rahv wrote an article in which he said in a measured sentence, "In a certain sense, this is our war." The rest of us were deeply shocked by this, because we regarded it as a useless imperialist war. You couldn't beat Fascism that way: "Fight the enemy at home," and so on. In other words, we reacted to the war rather in the manner as if it had been World War I. This was after Munich, after the so-called "Phony War." There was some reason for having certain doubts about the war, at least about the efficacy of the war. So when Philip wrote this article, a long controversy began on *Partisan Review*. It split between those who supported the war, and those who didn't. I was among those who didn't—Edmund Wilson also, though for slightly different reasons. Dwight Macdonald and Clement Greenberg split off, and Dwight founded his own magazine *Politics*, which started out as a Trotskyite magazine, and then became a libertarian, semi-anarchist one. Meyer Schapiro was in this group, and I forget who else. Edmund was really an unreconstructed isolationist. The others were either Marxist or libertarian. Of course there was a split in the Trotskyite movement at that period.

Toward the end of the war, I began to realize that there was something hypocritical about my position—that I was really supporting the war. I'd go to a movie—there was a marvelous documentary called *Desert Victory* about the British victory over Rommel's Africa Corps—and I'd find myself weeping madly when Montgomery's bagpipers went through to El Alamein. In other words, cheering the war, and on the other hand, being absolutely against Bundles for Britain, against Lend Lease—this was after Lend Lease, of course—against every practical thing. And suddenly, I remember—it must have been the summer of '45 that I first said this aloud—I remember it was on the Cape, at Truro. There were a lot of friends, Chiaromonte, Lionel Abel, Dwight, et cetera, at my house—by this time I was divorced

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from Edmund, or separated anyway. And I said, "You know, I think I, and all of us, are really *for* the war." This was the first time this had been said aloud by me. Dwight indignantly denied it. "I'm *not* for the war!" he said. But he was. Then I decided I wanted to give a blood transfusion. And I practically had to get cleared! Now no one was making me do this, but I felt I had to go and get cleared by my friends first. Was it wrong of me to support the war effort by giving a blood transfusion? It was agreed that it was all right. All this *fuss!* So I gave a blood transfusion, just one. Some other people were doing it too, I believe, independently, at the same time, people of more or less this tendency. That is the end of that story. Years later, I realized I really thought that Philip had been right, and that the rest of us had been wrong. Of course we didn't know about the concentration camps: the death camps hadn't started at the beginning. All that news came in fairly late. But once this news was in, it became clear—at least to me, and I still believe it—that the only way to have stopped it was in a military way. That only the military defeat of Hitler could stop this, and it had to be stopped. But it took a long, long time to come to this view. You're always afraid of making the same mistake over again. But the trouble is you can always correct an earlier mistake like our taking the attitude to World War II as if it were World War I, but if you ever try to project the correction of a mistake into the future, you may make a different one. That is, many people now are talking about World War III as if it were World War II.

INTERVIEWER

What I don't see, though, is how all this left you once the war was over.

MCCARTHY

Actually, as I remember, after the war was the very best period, politically, that I've been through. At that time, it seemed to me there was a lot of hope around. The war was over! Certain—perhaps—mistakes had been recognized. The

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bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, and there was a kind of general repentance of this fact. This was before the hydrogen bomb; and we never even dreamed that the Russians were going to get the atomic bomb. The political scene looked free. This was not only true for us—it seemed a good moment. At least there was still the hope of small libertarian movements. People like Dwight, and Chiaromonte and I used to talk about it a great deal, and even Koestler was writing at that period about the possiblity of founding oases—that's where I took the title of that book from. It seemed possible still, utopian but possible, to change the world on a small scale. Everyone was trying to live in a very principled way, but with quite a lot of energy, the energy that peace had brought, really. This was the period of the Marshall Plan, too. It was a good period. Then of course the Russians got the atom bomb, and the hydrogen bomb came. That was the end of *any* hope, or at least any hope that I can see of anything being done except in a massive way.

INTERVIEWER

How do you characterize your political opinion now?

MCCARTHY

Dissident!

INTERVIEWER

All the way round?

MCCARTHY

Yes! No, I still believe in what I believed in then—I still believe in a kind of libertarian socialism, a decentralized socialism. But I don't see any possibility of achieving it. That is, within the span that I can see, which would be, say, to the end of my son's generation, your generation. It really seems to me sometimes that the only hope is Space. That is to say, perhaps the most energetic—in a bad sense—elements will move on to a new world in space. The problems of mass society will be transported into space, leaving behind this

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world as a kind of Europe, which then eventually tourists will visit. The Old World. I'm only half joking. I don't think that the problem of social equality has ever been solved. As soon as it looks as if it were going to be solved, or even as if it were going to be confronted,—say, as at the end of the eighteenth century—there's a mass move to a new continent which defers this solution. After '48, after the failure of the '48 revolutions in Europe, hope for an egalitarian Europe really died, and the '48'ers, many of them, went to California in the Gold Rush as '49'ers. My great-grandfather, from Central Europe, was one of them. The Gold Rush, the Frontier was a substitute sort of equality. Think of Chaplin's film. And yet once the concept of equality had entered the world, life becomes intolerable without it; yet life continues without its being realized. So it may be that there will be another displacement, another migration. The problem, the solution, or the confrontation, will again be postponed.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that your critical work, whether it's political or literary, creates any problems in relation to your work as a novelist?

MCCARTHY

No, except that you have the perpetual problem if, somebody asks you to do a review, whether to interrupt what you're writing—if you're writing a novel—to do the review. You have to weigh whether the subject interests you enough, or whether you're tired at that moment, emotionally played out by the fiction you're writing. Whether it would be a good thing to stop and concentrate on something else. I just agreed to and did a review of Camus' collected fiction and journalism. That *was* in some way connected with my own work, with the question of the novel in general. I thought, yes, I will do this because I want to read all of Camus and decide what I think about him finally. (Actually, I ended up almost as baffled as when I started.) But in general, I don't take a review unless it's something like that. Or unless Anthony West

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attacks Dickens. You know. Either it has to be some sort of thing that I want very much to take sides on, or something I'd like to study a bit, that I want to find out about anyway. Or where there may, in the case of study, be some reference —very indirect—back to my own work.

INTERVIEWER

This is quite a change from the time when you wrote criticism and never even thought of writing fiction. But now you consider yourself a novelist? Or don't you bother with these distinctions?

MCCARTHY

Well, I suppose I consider myself a novelist. Yes. Still, whatever way I write was really, I suppose, formed critically. That is, I learned to write reviews and criticism and then write novels so that however I wrote, it was formed that way. George Eliot, you know, began by translating Strauss, began by writing about German philosophy—though her philosophic passages are not at all good in *Middlemarch*. Nevertheless, I *think* that this kind of training really makes one more interested in the subject than in the style. Her work certainly doesn't suffer from any kind of stylistic frippery. There's certainly no voluminous drapery around. There is a kind of concision in it, at her best—that passage where she's describing the character of Lydgate—which shows, I think, the critical and philosophic training. I've never liked the conventional conception of "style." What's confusing is that style usually means some form of fancy writing—when people say, oh yes, so and so's such a "wonderful stylist." But if one means by style the voice, the irreducible and always recognizable and alive thing, then of course style is really everything. It's what you find in Stendhal, it's what you find in Pasternak. The same thing you find in a poet—the sound of, say, Donne's voice. In a sense, you can't go further in an analysis of Donne than to be able to place this voice, in the sense that you recognize Don Giovanni by the voice of Don Giovanni.

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INTERVIEWER

In speaking of your own writing, anyway, you attribute its "style" to your earlier critical work—then you don't feel the influence of other writers of fiction?

MCCARTHY

I don't think I have any influences. I think my first story, the first one in *The Company She Keeps*, definitely shows the Jamesian influence—James is so terribly catching. But beyond that, I can't find any influence. That is, I can't as a detached person—as detached as I can be—look at my work and see where it came from from the point of view of literary sources.

INTERVIEWER

There must be certain writers, though, that you are *drawn* to more than others.

MCCARTHY

Oh yes! But I don't think I write like them. The writer I really like best is Tolstoy, and I *know* I don't write like Tolstoy. I wish I did! Perhaps the best English prose is Thomas Nash. I don't write at all like Thomas Nash.

INTERVIEWER

It would seem also, from hints you give us in your books, that you like Roman writers as well.

MCCARTHY

I did when I was young, very much. At least, I adored Catullus, and Juvenal; those were the two I really passionately loved. And Caesar, when I was a girl. But you couldn't say that I had been influenced by *Catullus!* No! And Stendhal I like very very much. Again, I would be happy to write like Stendhal, but I don't. There are certain sentences in Stendhal that come to mind as how to do it if one could. I can't. A certain kind of clarity and brevity—the author's attitude summed up in a sentence, and done so simply, done without patronizing. Some sort of joy.

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INTERVIEWER

It's a dangerous game to play, the influence one.

MCCARTHY

Well in some cases it's easy to see, and people themselves acknowledge it, and are interested in it, as people are interested in their genealogy. I simply can't find my ancestors. I was talking to somebody about John Updike, and he's another one I would say I can't find any sources for.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like his writing?

MCCARTHY

Yes. I've not quite finished *Rabbit, Run*—I must get it back from the person I lent it to and finish it. I thought it was very good, and so stupidly reviewed. I'd read *Poorhouse Fair*, which I thought was really remarkable. Perhaps it suffered from the point-of-view problem, the whole virtuosity of doing it through the eyes of this old man sitting on the verandah of the poorhouse, through his eyes with their refraction, very old eyes, and so on. I think, in a way, this trick prevents him saying a good deal in the book. Nevertheless, it's quite a remarkable book. But anyway, I nearly didn't read *Rabbit, Run* because I thought, Oh my God! from reading those reviews. The reviewers seemed to be under the impression that the hero was a terrible character. It's incredible! No, I think it's the most interesting American novel I've read in quite a long time.

INTERVIEWER

What about others? Did you like *Henderson the Rain King?*

MCCARTHY

Well yes, the first part of *Henderson* I think is marvelous. The vitality! I still think it's an amusing novel right through the lions, almost like a French eighteenth-century novel, or *conte*, very charming. But it doesn't have this tremendous

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blast of vitality that the first part has, and it doesn't have the density.

INTERVIEWER

What other recent American novels have you been interested by?

MCCARTHY

Well, name one. There really aren't any! I mean, are there? I can't think of any. I don't like Salinger, not at all. That last thing isn't a novel anyway, whatever it is. I don't like it. Not at all. It suffers from this terrible sort of metropolitan sentimentality and it's *so* narcissistic. And to me, also, it seemed so false, so calculated. Combining the plain man with an absolutely megalomaniac egoism. I simply can't stand it.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of women writers, or do you think the category "woman writer" should not be made?

MCCARTHY

Some women writers make it. I mean, there's a certain kind of woman writer who's a capital W, capital W. Virginia Woolf certainly was one, and Katherine Mansfield was one, and Elizabeth Bowen is one. Katherine Anne Porter? Don't think she really is—I mean, her writing is certainly very feminine, but I would say that there wasn't this "WW" business in Katherine Anne Porter. Who else? There's Eudora Welty, who's certainly not a "Woman Writer." Though she's become one lately.

INTERVIEWER

What is it that happens to make this change?

MCCARTHY

I think they become interested in décor. You notice the change in Elizabeth Bowen. Her early work is much more masculine. Her later work has much more drapery in it.

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Who else? Jane Austen was never a "Woman Writer," I don't think. The cult of Jane Austen pretends that she was, but I don't think she was. George Eliot *certainly* wasn't, and George Eliot is the kind of woman writer I admire. I was going to write a piece at some point about this called "Sense and Sensibility," dividing women writers into these two. I *am* for the ones who represent sense, and so was Jane Austen.

INTERVIEWER

Getting away from novels for a moment, I'd like to ask you about *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* if I might. Will you write any more autobiography?

MCCARTHY

I was just reading—oh God, actually I *was* just starting to read Simone de Beauvoir's second volume, *La Force de l'Age*, and she announces in the preface that she can't write about her later self with the same candor that she wrote about her girlhood.

INTERVIEWER

You feel that too?

MCCARTHY

On this one point I agree with her. One has to be really old, I think, really quite an old person—and by that time I don't know what sort of shape one's memory would be in.

INTERVIEWER

You don't agree with her on other points?

MCCARTHY

I had an interview with *L'Express* the other day, and I gave Simone de Beauvoir the works. Let's not do it twice. I think she's pathetic, that's all. This book is supposed to be better, more interesting anyway, than the first one because it's about the Thirties, and everyone wants to read about the Thirties. And her love affair with Sartre, which is just about the whole substance of this book, is supposed to be very touching. The

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book *is* more interesting than the first one. But I think she's odious. A mind totally bourgeois turned inside out.

INTERVIEWER

I have something else to ask, apropos of *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. There are certain points, important points and moments in your novels, where you deepen or enlarge the description of the predicament in which a character may be by reference to a liturgical or ecclesiastical or theological parallel or equivalence. What I want to know is, is this simply a strict use of analogy, a technical literary device, or does it indicate any conviction that these are valid and important ways of judging a human being?

MCCARTHY

I suppose it's a reference to a way of thinking about a human being. But I think at their worst they're rather just literary references. That is, slightly show-off literary references. I have a terrible compulsion to make them—really a dreadful compulsion. The first sentence of *The Stones of Florence* begins, "How can you stand it? This is the first thing, and the last thing, the eschatological question that the visitor leaves echoing in the air behind him." Something of that sort. Well, everybody was after me to take out that word. I left it out when I published that chapter in the *New Yorker*, but I put it back in the book. No, I do have this great compulsion to make those references. I think I do it as a sort of secret signal, a sort of looking over the heads of the readers who don't recognize them to the readers who do understand them.

INTERVIEWER

If these references *are* only literary ones, secret signals, then they are blasphemous.

MCCARTHY

Yes, I see what you mean. I suppose they are. Yes, they are secret jokes, they are blasphemies. But—I think I said something of this in the introduction of *Catholic Girlhood*—I think

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that religion offers to Americans (I mean the Roman Catholic religion) very often the only history and philosophy they ever get. A reference to it somehow opens up that historical vista. In that sense it is a device for deepening the passage.

INTERVIEWER

Could we go back to your novels for a moment? I'd like to ask you about how you begin on them. Do you start with the characters, the situation, the plot? What comes first? Perhaps that's too hard a question, too general.

MCCARTHY

Very hard, and I'm awfully specific. I can really only think in specific terms, at least about myself. *The Groves of Academe* started with the plot. The plot and this figure: there can't be the plot without this figure of the impossible individual, the unemployable professor and his campaign for justice. Justice, both in quotes, you know, and serious in a way. What *is* justice for the unemployable person? That was conceived from the beginning as a plot: the whole idea of the reversal at the end, when Mulcahy is triumphant and the President is about to lose his job or quit, when the worm turns and is triumphant. I didn't see exactly what would happen in between; the more minute details weren't worked out. But I did see that there would be his campaign for reinstatement and then his secret would be discovered. In this case that he had *not* been a Communist. *A Charmed Life* began with a short story; the first chapter was written as a short story. When I conceived the idea of its being a novel, I think about all I knew was that the heroine would have to die in the end. Everybody objected to that ending, and said that it was terrible to have her killed in an automobile accident in the last paragraph—utterly unprepared for, and so on. But the one thing I knew absolutely certainly was that the heroine had to die in the end. At first I was going to have her have an abortion, and have her die in the abortion. But that seemed to me so trite. Then I conceived the idea of having her drive on the correct side of the road and get killed, because in this

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weird place everyone is always on the wrong side of the road. But all that is really implicit in the first chapter.

INTERVIEWER

So the charge that readers are unprepared for the last paragraph you feel is unfair?

MCCARTHY

There may be something wrong with the novel, I don't know. But it was always supposed to have a fairy tale element in it. New Leeds is *haunted!* Therefore nobody should be surprised if something unexpected happens, or something catastrophic, for the place is also pregnant with catastrophe. But it may be that the treatment in between was too realistic, so that the reader was led to expect a realistic continuation of everything going on in a rather moderate way. It was, to some extent, a symbolic story. The novel is supposed to be about doubt. All the characters in different ways represent doubt, whether it is philosophical or ontological doubt as in the case of the strange painter who questions everything—"Why don't I murder my grandmother?" and so on. Or the girl's rather nineteenth-century self-doubt, doubt of the truth, of what she perceives. In any case, everyone is supposed to represent one or another form of doubt. When the girl finally admits to herself that she's pregnant, and also recognizes that she must do something about it, in other words, that she has to put up a real stake—and she does put up a real stake—at that moment she becomes mortal. All the other characters are immortal. They have dozens of terrible accidents, and they're all crippled in one way or another, and yet they have this marvelous power of survival. All those drunks and human odds and ends. Anyway, the girl makes the decision—which from the point of view of conventional morality is a wicked decision—to have an abortion, to kill life. Once she makes this decision, she becomes mortal, and doesn't belong to the charmed circle any more. As soon as she makes it, she gets killed—to get killed is simply a symbol of the fact that she's mortal.

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INTERVIEWER

You say that her decision makes her mortal. But her decision has also included someone else, the painter.

MCCARTHY

Yes, yes. I see what you mean. I hadn't thought of that, that when she asks somebody to help her it implies some sort of social bond, some sort of mutual bond between people in society, while the rest of these people are still a community of isolates.

INTERVIEWER

His joining her in this mortal, social bond, that doesn't make him mortal as well? He is still a part of the charmed circle?

MCCARTHY

He's too sweet to be mortal! Well, he's a comic figure, and I have this belief that all comic characters are immortal. They're eternal. I believe this is Bergson's theory too. He has something, I'm told, about comic characters being *figé*. Like Mr. and Mrs. Micawber: they all have to go on forever and be invulnerable. Almost all Dickens' characters have this peculiar existence of eternity, except the heroes, except Pip, or Nicholas Nickleby, or David Copperfield.

INTERVIEWER

What other characters in your novels do you consider—

MCCARTHY

The comic ones? Who knows whether they're immortal! As far as I'm concerned, they're immortal!

INTERVIEWER

Then you haven't thought of this distinction between "mortal" and "immortal" in relation to characters in other of your novels besides *A Charmed Life?*

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MCCARTHY

I didn't think of this distinction until just recently, and not in connection with myself. It's just at this very moment—*now* talking with you—that I'm thinking of it in connection with myself. I would say that it is a law that applies to *all* novels: that the comic characters are *figé*, are immortal, and that the hero or heroine exists in time, because the hero or heroine is always in some sense equipped with purpose.

The man in *The Groves of Academe*. Well, he's immortal, yes. He is a comic villain, and villains too always—I think—partake in this comic immortality. I *think* so. I'm not sure that you couldn't find an example, though, of a villain it wasn't true of. In Dickens again. In the late novels, somebody like Bradley Headstone, the schoolmaster, he's a mixed case. He's certainly not a villain in the sense of, say, the villain in *Little Dorritt*, who belongs to the old-fashioned melodramatic immortal type of villain. Headstone is really half a hero, Steerforth is half a hero, and therefore they don't conform to this.

This all came to me last year, this distinction, when I was thinking about the novel. Not my novel: *The Novel*.

But maybe that's really part of the trouble I'm having with *my* novel! These girls are all essentially comic figures, and it's awfully hard to make anything happen to them. Maybe this is really the trouble! Maybe I'm going to find out something in this interview! That the whole problem is *time!* I mean for me, in this novel. The passage of time, to show development. I think maybe my trouble is that these girls are comic figures, and that therefore they really can't develop! You see what I mean? They're not all so terribly comic, but most of them are.

How're they ever going to progress through the twenty years between the inauguration of Roosevelt and the inauguration of Eisenhower? This has been the great problem, and here I haven't had a form for it. I mean, all I know is that they're supposed to be middle-aged at the end.

Yes, I think maybe that *is* the trouble. One possibility would be... I've been introducing them one by one, chapter by chapter. They all appear at the beginning, you know, like

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the beginning of an opera, or a musical comedy. And then I take them one by one, chapter by chapter. I have been bringing each one on a little later on in time. But perhaps I can make bigger and bigger jumps so that you could meet, say, the last one when she is already middle-aged. You see what I mean. Maybe this would solve the problem. One five years later, another eight years later, and so on. I could manage the time problem that way. This has been very fruitful! Thank you!

INTERVIEWER

I want to ask you about the problem of time in the novel. You have written that a novel's action cannot take place in the future. But you have said that the action described in *The Oasis* all takes place in the future.

MCCARTHY

The Oasis is not a novel. I don't classify it as such. It was terribly criticized, you know, on that ground; people objected, said it wasn't a novel. But I never meant it to be. It's a *conte*, a *conte philosophique*.

INTERVIEWER

And *A Charmed Life* you say has fairy tale elements.

MCCARTHY

I'm not sure any of my books are novels. Maybe none of them are. Something happens in my writing—I don't mean it to—a sort of distortion, a sort of writing on the bias, seeing things with a sort of swerve and swoop. *A Charmed Life*, for instance. You know, at the beginning I make a sort of inventory of all the town characters, just telling who they are. Now I did this with the intention of describing, well, this nice ordinary old-fashioned New England town. But it ended up differently. Something is distorted, the description takes on a sort of extravagance—I don't know exactly how it happens. I know I don't mean it to happen.

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INTERVIEWER

You say in one of your articles that perhaps the fault lies simply in the material which the modern world affords, that it itself lacks—

MCCARTHY

Credibility? Yes. It's a difficulty I think all modern writers have.

INTERVIEWER

Other than the problem of arrangement of time, are there other specific technical difficulties about the novel you find yourself particularly concerned with?

MCCARTHY

Well, the whole question of the point of view which tortures everybody. It's the problem that everybody's been up against since Joyce, if not before. Of course James really began it, and Flaubert even. You find it as early as *Madame Bovary*. The problem of the point of view, and the voice: *style indirect libre*—the author's voice, by a kind of ventriloquism, disappearing in and completely limited by the voices of his characters. What it has meant is the complete banishment of the author. I would like to restore the author! I haven't tried yet, but I'd like to try after this book, which is as far as I can go in ventriloquism. I would like to try to restore the author. Because you find that if you obey this Jamesian injunction of "Dramatize, dramatize," and especially if you deal with comic characters, as in my case, there is so much you can't say because you're limited by these mentalities. It's just that a certain kind of intelligence—I'm not only speaking of myself, but of anybody, Saul Bellow, for example—is more or less absent from the novel, and has to be, in accordance with these laws which the novel has made for itself. I think one reason that everyone—at least I—welcomed *Doctor Zhivago* was that you had the author in the form of the hero. And this beautiful tenor voice, the hero's voice and the author's—this marvelous voice, and this clear sound of

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intelligence. The Russians have never gone through the whole development of the novel you find in Joyce, Faulkner, et cetera, so that Pasternak was slightly unaware of the problem! But I think this technical development has become absolutely killing to the novel.

INTERVIEWER

You say that after this novel about the Vassar girls, you—

MCCARTHY

I don't know what I'm going to do, but I want to try something that will introduce, at least back into my work, my own voice. And not in the disguise of a heroine. I'm awfully sick of my heroine. I don't mean in this novel: my heroine of the past. Because the sensibility in each novel got more and more localized with this heroine, who became an agent of perception, et cetera.

Let me make a jump now. The reason that I enjoyed doing those books on Italy, the Venice and Florence books, was that I was writing *in my own voice*. One book was in the first person, and one was completely objective, but it doesn't make any difference. I felt, you know, now I can talk freely! The books were written very fast, the Venice one faster. Even the Florence book, with masses of research in it, was written very fast, with a great deal of energy, with a kind of liberated energy. And without the peculiar kind of painstakingness that's involved in the dramatization that one does in a novel, that is, when nothing can come in that hasn't been perceived through a character. The technical difficulties are so great, in projecting yourself, in feigning an alien consciousness, that too much energy gets lost, I think, in the masquerade. And I think this is not only true of me.

INTERVIEWER

How did you come to write those books about Florence and Venice?

MCCARTHY

By chance. I was in Paris, just about to go home to America,

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and somebody called up and asked if I would come and have a drink at the Ritz before lunch, that he wanted to ask me something. It was an intermediary from the Berniers, who edit *L'Oeil*. They were in Lausanne, and this man wanted to know whether I would write a book on Venice for them. I had been in Venice once for ten days, years ago, but it seemed somehow adventurous. And there were other reasons too. So I said yes. I went out to meet the Berniers in Lausanne. I had absolutely no money left, about twenty dollars, and I thought, what if all this is a terrible practical joke? You know. I'll get to Lausanne and there won't be any of these people! There'll be nobody! I ran into Jay Laughlin that night, and he said that his grandmother was in Lausanne at the moment, so that if anything happened to me, I could call on his grandmother! But in any case, I went to Lausanne, and they were real, they were there. And we drove to Venice together. I knew nothing about the subject—maybe I exaggerate my ignorance now—but I was *appalled*. I was afraid to ask any questions—whenever I'd ask a question Georges Bernier would shudder because it revealed such absolutely terrifying depths of ignorance. So I tried to be silent. I'd never heard before that there was more than one Tiepolo, or more than one Tintoretto, that there was a son. I vaguely knew Bellini, but didn't have any idea there were three Bellinis. Things like that. I couldn't have been expected to know Venetian history, but actually Venetian history is very easy to bone up on, and there isn't much. But the art history! And I considered myself a reasonably cultivated person! My art history was of the most fragmentary nature! But it was fun, and then that led me into doing the Florence book. I didn't want to, at first. But everthing in Venice, in Italy for that matter, really points to Florence, everything in the Renaissance anyway, like signposts on a road. Whenever you're near discovery, you're near Florence. So I felt that this was all incomplete; I thought I had to go to Florence. It was far from my mind to write a book. Then various events happened, and slowly I decided, All right! I would do the book on Florence. After that I went back to Venice and studied the Florentines in Venice, just for

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a few days. It was *so* strange to come back to Venice after being immersed in Florence. It looked so terrible! From an architectural point of view, *so* scrappy and nondescript, if you'd been living with the Florentine substance and monumentality, and intellectuality of architecture. At first coming back was a real shock. Oh, and I discovered I liked history! And I thought, my God, maybe I've made a mistake. Maybe I should have been an historian.

INTERVIEWER

It would also appear that you discovered you loved Brunelleschi.

MCCARTHY

Oh yes! Yes! Also, I felt a great, great congeniality—I don't mean with Brunelleschi personally, I would flatter myself if I said that—but with the history of Florence, the Florentine temperament. I felt that through the medium of writing about this city I could set forth what I believed in, what I was for; that through this city, its history, its architects and painters—more its sculptors than its painters—it was possible for me to say what I believed in. And say it very affirmatively, even though this all ended in 1529, you know, long before the birth of Shakespeare.

INTERVIEWER

In reading the Florence book, I remember being very moved by the passage where you talk of Brunelleschi, about his "absolute integrity and essence," that solidity of his, both real and ideal. When you write about Brunelleschi, you write about this sureness, this "being-itself," and yet as a novelist—in *The Company She Keeps* for instance—you speak of something so very different, and you take almost as a theme this fragmented unplaceability of the human personality.

MCCARTHY

But I was very young then. I think I'm really not interested in the quest for the self any more. Oh, I suppose everyone

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continues to be interested in the quest for the self, but what you feel when you're older, I think, is that—how to express this—that you really must *make* the self. It's absolutely useless to look for it, you won't find it, but it's possible in some sense to make it. I don't mean in the sense of making a mask, a Yeatsian mask. But you finally begin in some sense to make and to choose the self you want.

INTERVIEWER

Can you write novels about that?

MCCARTHY

I never have. I never have, I've never even thought of it. That is, I've never thought of writing a developmental novel in which a self of some kind is discovered or is made, is forged, as they say. No. I suppose in a sense I don't know any more today than I did in 1941 about what my identity is. But I've stopped looking for it. I must say, I believe much more in truth now than I did. I do believe in the solidity of truth much more. Yes. I believe there is a truth, and that it's knowable.

—ELISABETH NIEBUHR

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DENISE LEVERTOV

LOVE SONG

Your beauty, which I lost sight of once
for a long time, is long,
not symmetrical, and wears
the earth colors that make me see it.

A long beauty, what is that?
A song
that can be sung over and over,
long notes or long bones.

Love is a landscape the long mountains
define but don't
shut off from the
unseeable distance.

In fall, in fall,
your trees stretch
their long arms in sleeves
of earth-red and

sky-yellow, a little
lop-sided. I take
long walks among them. The grapes
that need frost to ripen them

are amber and grow deep in the
hedge, half-concealed,
the way your beauty grows in long tendrils
half in darkness.

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JOHN HOLLANDER

LAZIENKA

On a Polish Palace, Restored

Ruins are what we make of them, and wrecked
Imaginations could want to do so little
With any real rubble. Acres of crumbled bricks,
Painful, cracked chunks of stucco, even, can be
Reused with the right kind of patience, fitted
        Back into a kind of free
Orderliness again. If broken Doric
Columns look less like finished sculptures now
Than twisted piles of rusty scrap, all stuck
About with dreadful bits of plaster do,
It's not because our own junked age is over
Yet, but that young welders are so clever.

By ruins, I don't particularly mean
Elaborate abbeys by quiescent lakes
Where round grey stones open to blue of noon,
Or chi-chi temples of Embattled Virtue
Arrayed, half-hidden, half-unclothed, in parks.
        Ruination is the ordure
Of violence: a burned-out mattress, still
Stinking of scorch; smashed glass; or the broiled ooze
Of something organic on a plate of dull
Metal. The calyx of no blasted rose,
No shard with a red shape on it, resembles
These portions of a way of life in shambles.

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And even though our fast romantics paint
Lyrical landscapes with old garter-belts
And parts of washcloths smeared with *Dreck*, they can't
Drive fancy hard enough now to catch up
With actual messes. Wreckage that insults
Enterprise so, tends to stop
The workings of our feelings, not elicit
Sighs for the lostness of ordered scenes that we
Can't manage to crawl into. Even to visit
A ruin in working order means to see
The kind of myth each tragedy most wishes,
Made up of whole sackcloth and mortared ashes.

Berlin's *Gedächtniskirche* only came
Into its own, perhaps, when its half-burnt
Loaf, from the bottom of *Kurfürstendamm*,
Could start to gleam against all the grim glitter
Restored around it, finally having learned
How to be a Ruin. Slaughter,
Fire, and irradiations look like hell,
However, and decomposition always
Sickens, where planned disorder merely will
Embolden in their search our shaded eyes,
The while that Past whose traces they demand
Is never really wrecked, but merely ends.

And so with the most logical *Aufbau*,
Even, of pictures of the shattered world,
As with the restorations the mind's eye
Makes of its glimpses of what never fell.
A summer palace set among its gnarled,
Old great oaks in Poland, well
Proportioned for its time, with a surprise
In the dramatic placement of the water,
Now a rest home for the ruins of wise,
Old men, remains a ruin even after
A People's Republic rebuilds history
Around the craters of catastrophe.

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What of this other, City Palace, then,
Properly fitted with antiquities
And blooming among Warsaw's fields of ruin,
Those acres of flat waste, disrupted only
By a few, spare piles of stone, and crowned with this
Artificial ruin, lonely
On its isle in the water? Quite the thing
Back in the seventeen-eighties, it was made
For Stanislaus Augustus who was king:
Back in the nineteen-forties, all was laid
To waste around it. Through the blasts and pounding,
Only the phoney ruin remained standing,

—Almost, it seems, for our edification.
But once in Warsaw I, a ruin, too
(If a remnant of all the six forgotten
Millions is a true ruin), could muse and stare
With unwrecked eyes at a landscape or two.
Fragments of a burnt race share
No flaming pains with all the perished part
For which this ruined city's still consumed
With no great love. The eye, more than the heart,

Composes rusty ironies outworn
Still into pictures, always doomed
To look more like an early autumn morn
Breaking upon an over-planted pile
Than like the frightful messes of what just
Has happened, horribly, in the night, the while
We unobserving sleep the sleep of dust,
Never quite forgetting that every city
Will one day flower in a burning instead of beauty.

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PHILIP LEVINE

THE TURNING

Unknown faces in the street
and winter coming on. I
stand in the last moments of
the city, no more a child,
only a man—one who has
looked upon his own nakedness
without shame and in defeat
has seen nothing to bless.
Touched once, like a plum, I turned
rotten in the meat, or like
the plum blossom I never
saw, hard at the edges, burned
at the first entrance of life,
and so endured, unreckoned,
untaken, with nothing to give.
The first Jew was God; the second
denied him; I am alive.

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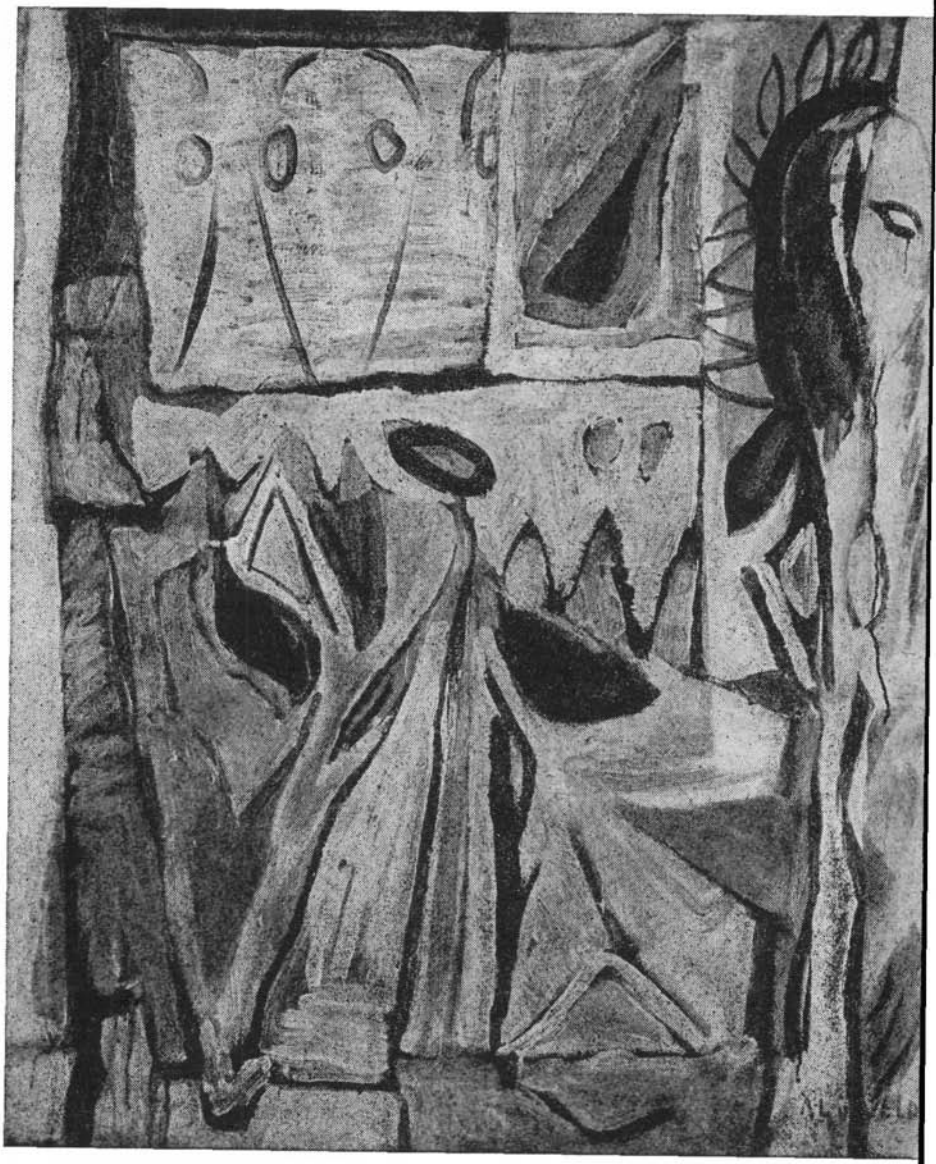

Oil, 1932

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Bram van Velde

He who sees for the first time a recent oil or gouache by Bram van Velde, with its forms towering and instantly collapsed, its openings through which filters a mad hope at once obstructed, its blinding flares swallowed in night—he will wonder how so non-representational a work can seem so little "abstract." Before the last war, the human figure, landscape and still-life drew from Bram van Velde the roughest, wildest accents in contemporary painting. Expressionism? He could more aptly be called an *inexpressionist*. He does not turn away from reality: it is reality that turns away from him. There is a presence in his figurative canvases, or rather an *absence*, at first barely perceptible, but greater and more disturbing with each passing day, as when we are with someone whose mind is elsewhere. The liberation—supposing, that is, that to come nearer to one's truth is a liberation—occurs when the artist finally consents to the dictates of absence. But to reach this point, he must have acquired the certainty that man is irremediably alone and reality an inescapable prison.

Born in 1895 in Holland, Bram van Velde worked in Germany, Paris, Majorca, whence the civil war chased him. In 1938, he is locked up for four weeks in solitary confinement in the prison of Bayonne. When he takes up painting again, after the Liberation, his work will be literally beyond recognition. It is these drawings, made in prison, that we present here, surrounded by one sample each of the work that preceeded and followed them.

—PIERRE SCHNEIDER

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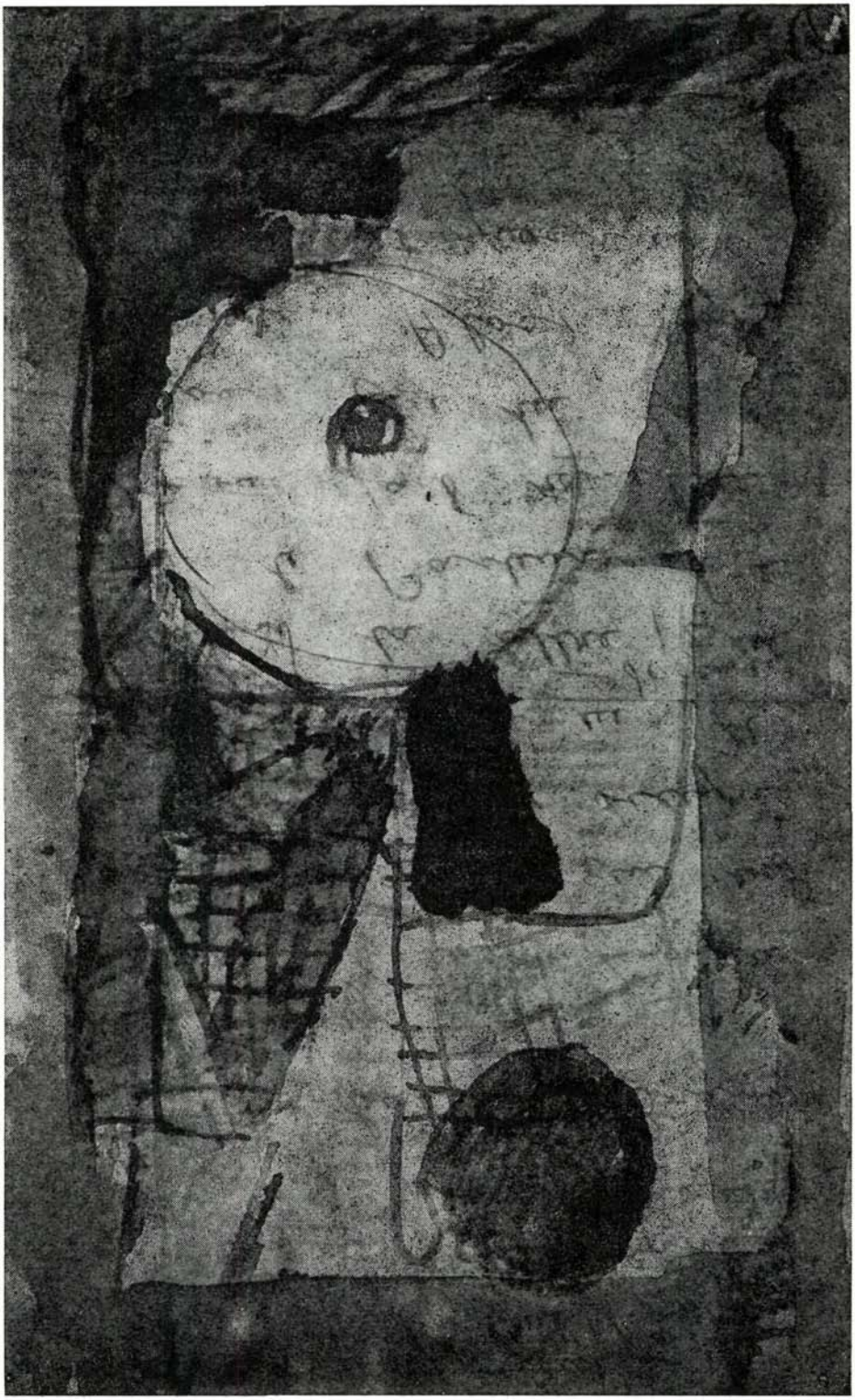

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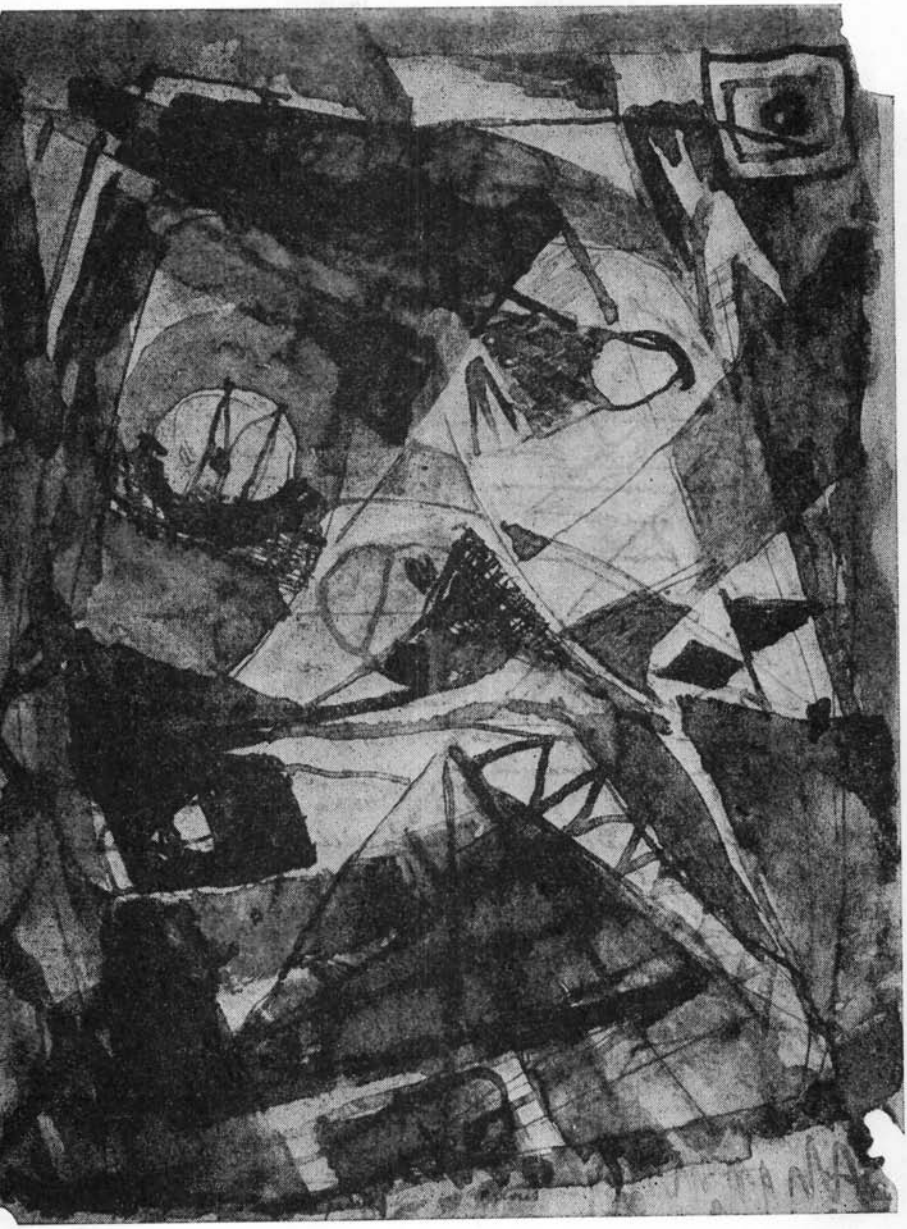

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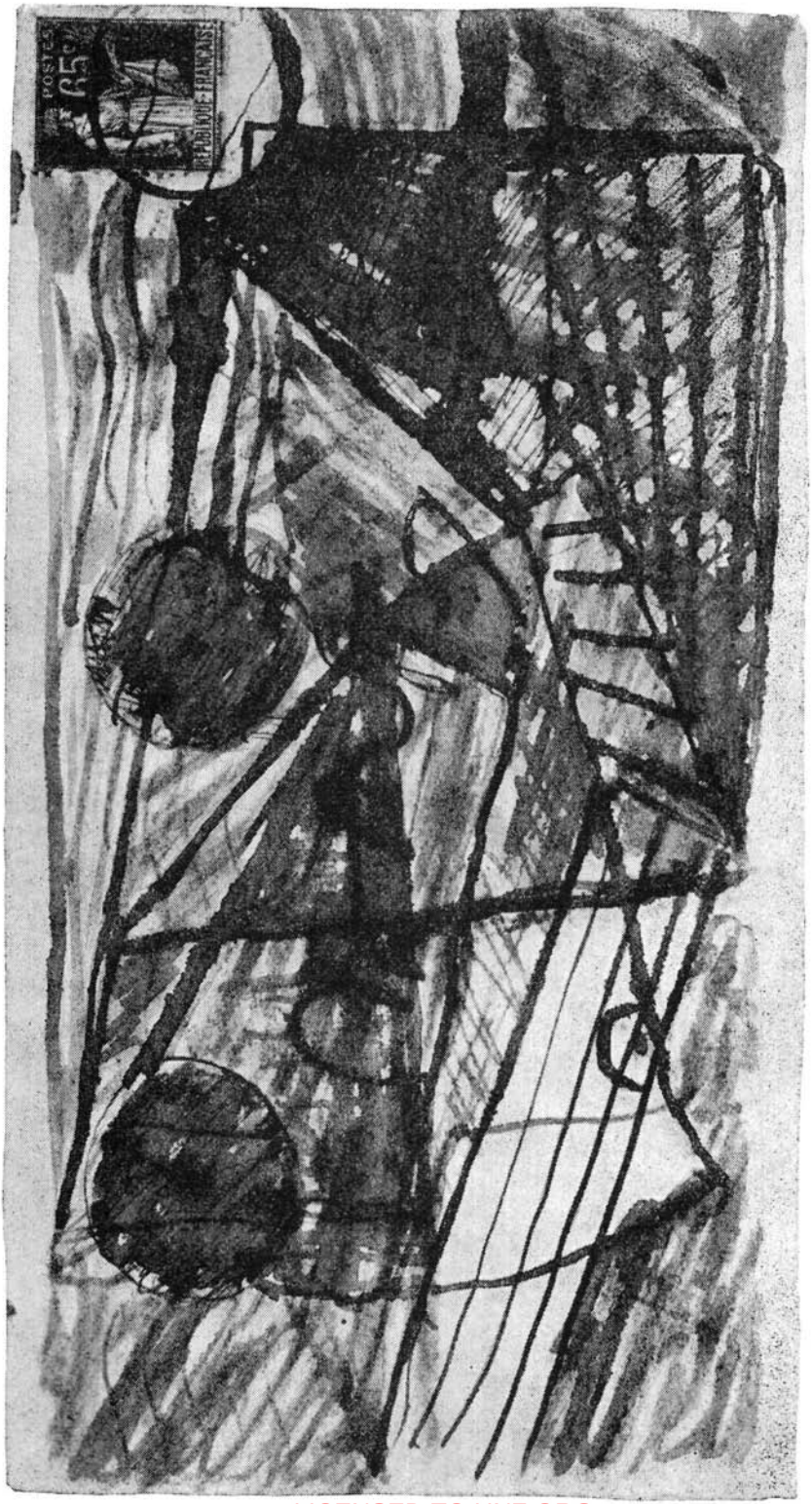

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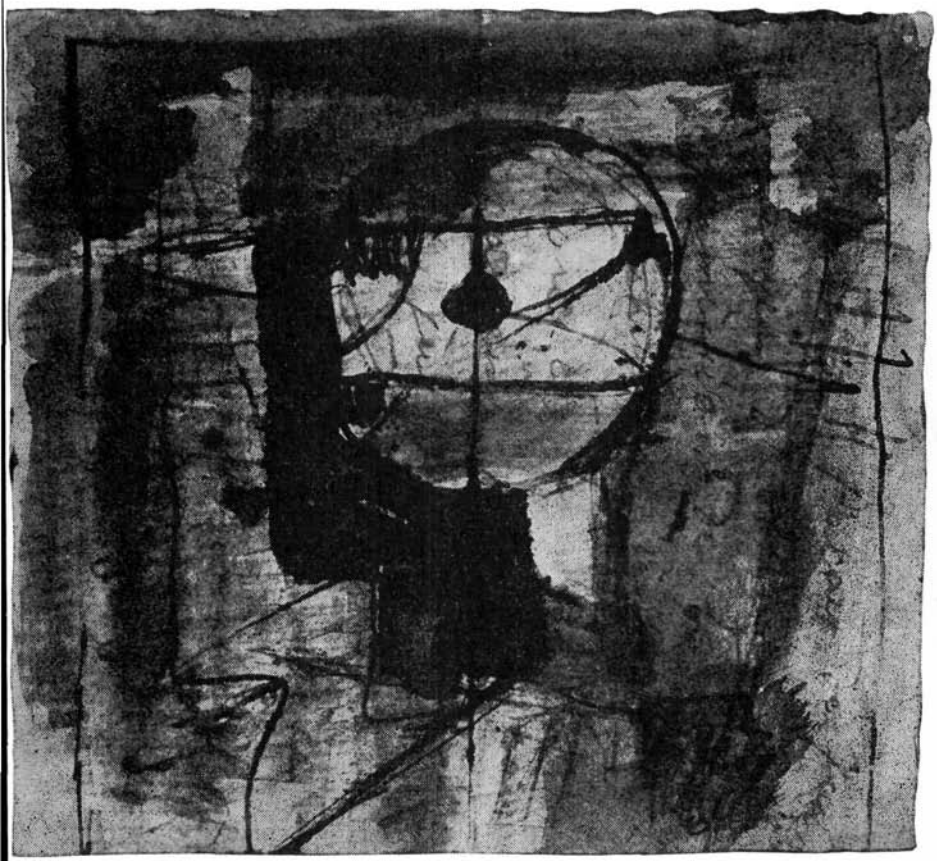

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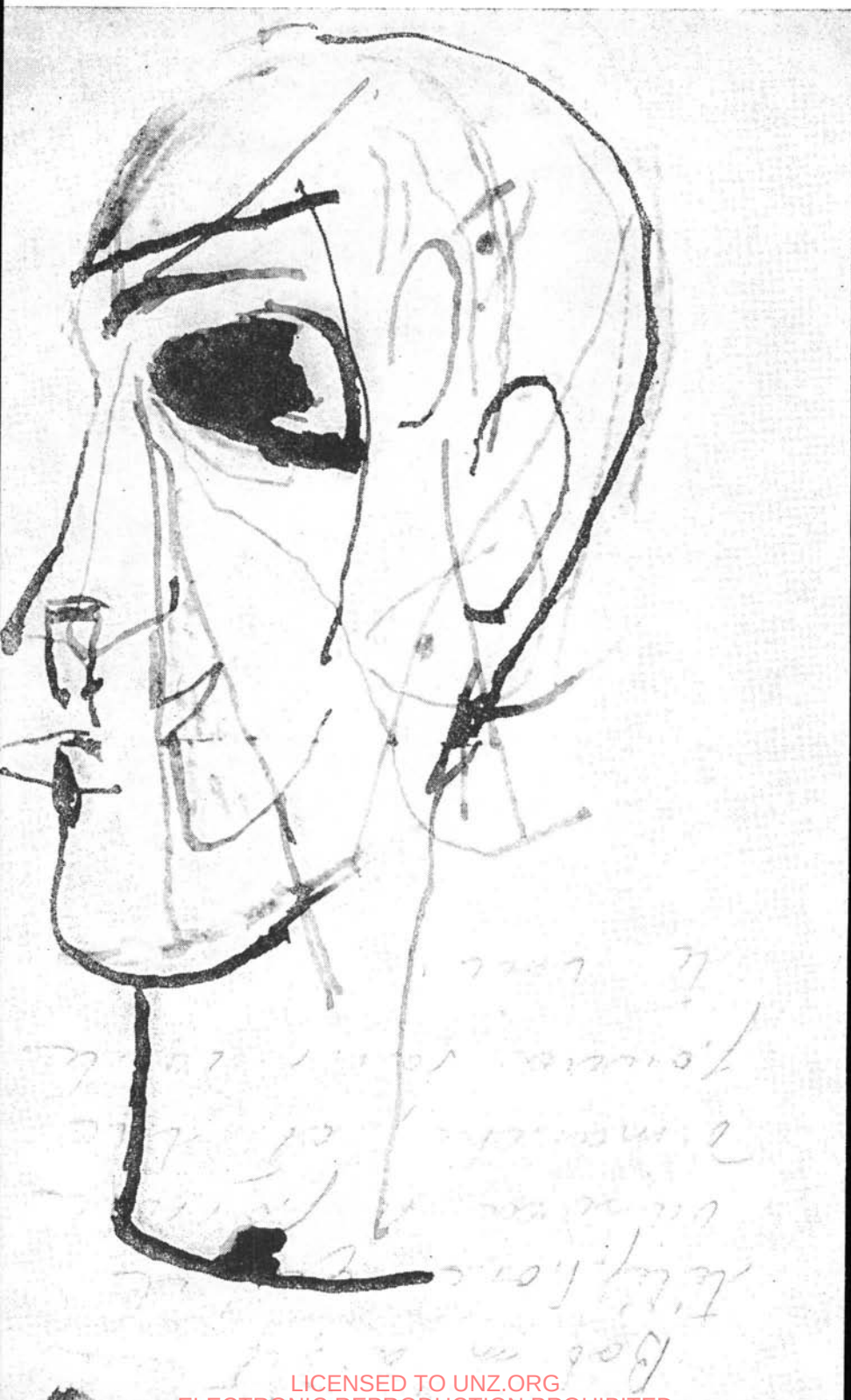

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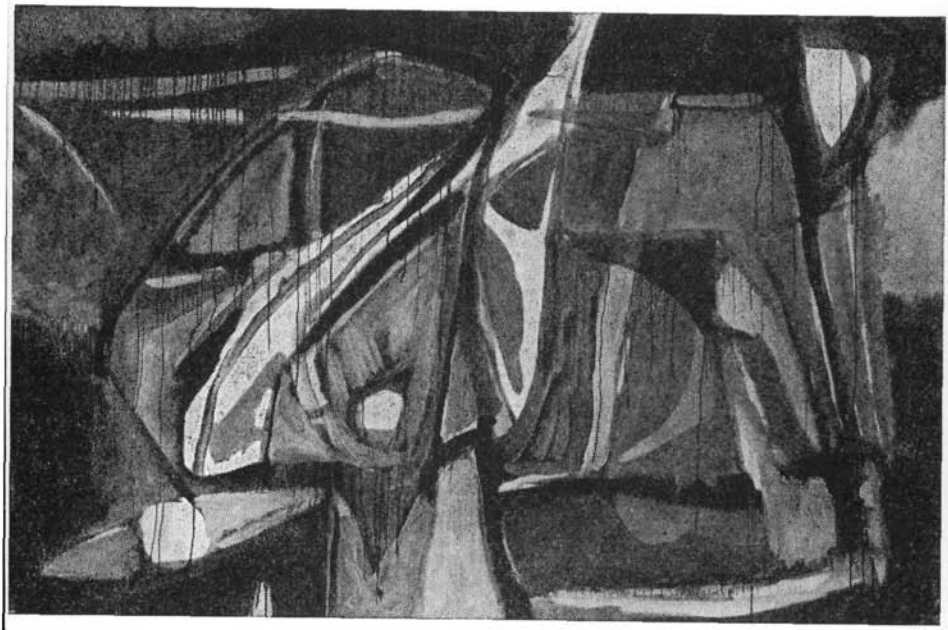

Oil, 1961

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BINK NOLL

PER SINGULOS DIES BENEDICIMUS TE

Once in the middle of a boy's walk
Where I came seeking facts to wonder at,
I found a relic left from a small life,
A specimen of skunk that had been hung

By its hunter from a scrub pine and skinned,
Its muscles turned leather, its fat yellow,
Shrunk in the greasy twine, and its teeth
Delicate as its claws, distinct, white, keen.

A make-believe boy in me flinched back.
He clamped my lids, raved, and jammed speed
Down my confused legs, but my true name
Pulled forward from the dark and vertigo

To fix my fingers on that fierce object
Swung in the largo of the dry place,
That animal fact cool as stone to the tip
Of my knowledge, that bronze indifference.

The bellow of Fear stammered in my ear.
It fled the universe of autumn.
It hauled off that loud boy and abandoned me
To the shape of silence gathered in my hand.

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GEORGE MACBETH

EATING ICE-CREAM WITH A GIRL

I lift my cone to hers
As if drinking a toast.

Her pink tongue, like a cat's,
Darts out, licks,
Lingering on the cream.

Smiling a little, I watch
Her cross her legs, concerned
Only with what she eats.

Her teeth caress the crisp
Wafer: I bite,
Eager with appetite.

Thirst-quenching, cooled,
Slowly, water-ice drips.
Gulping, I finish mine

And lick my fingertips.
Nibbling, she makes hers last.

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HARRY MATHEWS

THE CONVERSIONS

The Adze

The wealthy amateur Grent Wayl invited me to his New York house for an evening's diversion. Welcoming me, he said: The cheek of our Bea! pointing to his niece, Miss Beatrice Fod, who, accompanied on the harmonium by her brother Isidore, sang to assembled guests.

At night when you're asleep
Without no pants on
Into your tent I'll creep
Without no pants on

Such nervous speech! Why should he mind, since the song delighted the company? Mr Wayl was aging, aging; but no-one would take his words lightly.

He led me upstairs to see one of his new acquisitions. In the library Mr Wayl laid an oblong case of green leather on a white table. Having turned on a ceiling spotlight to illuminate the case, he opened it. A weapon rested on the brilliant red lining, its smooth handle of ash, its billshaped flat blade of gold.

According to Mr Wayl, the instrument was a ritual adze. The side of the bill we had first beheld was plain, but its reverse was chased with wiry engravings, depicting seven scenes. Six had in common the figure of a longhaired woman with full breasts and a face crosshatched for swarthiness. Mr Wayl suggested that the woman was some heroine or saint, and that the engravings told her life. He looked at me curiously while he said this.

Mr Wayl asked me to interpret the series of engravings.

I began with the leftmost scene, in the point of the blade, where the woman stood naked at the mouth of a stream, with a pile of cowrie shells at her feet. The subject hardly suited the life of a saint, but I took it to be a decorative conceit—a quaint medieval mixture of pagan and Christian themes.

Illustrations by James Metcalf

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To the right of this, the woman stood upon clouds, above a throng of striped men bearing staves shaped like inverted L's. Below the clouds a disc emanated crooked spikes, while lower still people on the earth raised their hands. This clearly seemed to be the saint's manifestation, a descent from heaven. The stave-bearing figures were angels with pennons, the spiked disc the rejoicing sun.

In the next engraving the woman held one side of a small wreath; a man in simple vestments held the opposite side. I thought this man must be Christ presenting the saint with a crown of holiness.

The fourth scene showed the woman among battling knights, who were drawn gruesome and pathetic. The saint was surely putting an end to some battle, if not to war itself.

Next, the woman appeared outside a burning grove. Within it there were many tormented figures. She lifted her arms in supplication, as would befit one pleading for the damned.

In the sixth scene the woman knelt in front of a mitred priest who stretched his left hand over her. A fire, which I interpreted as a symbol of divine love, burned in the background. I had no doubt the scene showed the saint blessed by some pope.

The woman did not figure in the last engraving, which was decorative, I supposed, like the first one. In it four arrows, radii of one small arc, pointed to symbols representing the quarters of the moon. A bag of fish—possibly a Christian reference—hung below.

Mr Wayl had grown impatient during my remarks. He now exclaimed: You're as dumb as is!

Excuse me, sir, I said, if your pleasure was marred.

He was suddenly friendly: No one with purple eyes is stupid. But do you have perfect pitch?

I answered that I had. Leaving the library, he took the adze with him.

Preparations

As we descended the stairs Mr Wayl stopped me. Listen! Miss Fod was singing:

> The second queen was an Amazon
> With a terrible spear of brass

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Such music! said Mr Wayl. A real old tune—a lass's tenor. You must recognize it.

I listened:

Whistling the devil's salvation
In a girdle of crimson cowries

The three queens made thunder
And snapped stones with a feather
But Black Jack was the smartest crack
And married them all together

There was applause. Mr Wayl had left me listening; he now stood, encircled by the company, next to his niece and nephew. Following his summons I joined them.

Tonight's game, he said, will be a race. The contestants are Bea and Is, whom you all know, and—his hand on my shoulder—this gentleman. The prize will be my antique adze.

Servants entered to draw back the curtains at one side of the drawing-room, then to open the sliding panels of glass that formed the wall behind. We overlooked a greenhouse, whose fragrant heat rose quickly about us, but which we could see little of: it was unlighted except for three parallel bands, about two yards long, that were sunk in its floor near us. These shone dull green.

That is the course, said Mr Wayl. The bands, which are covered with a thin layer of salt slime, are lighted from below so that you can follow the race.

The contestants will be represented by these. He held out his opened cigarette case: in it lay small sticks of tobacco-colored stuff with a tuft of tangled white thread at the end of each.

Worms called zephyrs. They are dried out but alive; moisture will quicken them. On the course, which is wet, they will find in front of them a trail of their habitual food (tiny pharaohs) that will lead them to the finish.

As for the human contestants, they will do more than watch. Each must accompany his worm's advance with an ascending major scale, to be played on one of these instruments that as you doubtless know are named serpents.

Mr Wayl detached three S-ish wooden tubes from a wall panel behind him, fitted their lesser ends with silver mouthpieces, and silently demonstrated a scale on one of them, progressively unstopping its six fingerholes. The lowest and highest notes were obtained with all the holes stopped.

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It is curious, he said, that the holes are divided into groups of three by a length of wood having no proportion to the acoustical distance between the fourth and fifth notes of the scale. Nor do the spaces between the other holes vary with the interval; the holes are apparently bored for the convenience of the fingers. Yet the results are just. Thus with all holes open: see? With one: *re*. With three: *fa*. (Since these are C-serpents, the scale names are true.)

At the beginning of the race each contestant will play the lower *do*. The course bands are marked with six indentations; as his worm passes them the contestant must sound the subsequent tones—*re* at the first marker, *mi* at the second, and so on. Without this accompaniment the worm's progress counts for nothing. The race will end with the first high *do*.

Mr Wayl gave us our instruments.

For you, Bea, a fine French example made for the Duchess of Lissixg, who was known as "the Imp Queen"—but I can't remember the Latin for imp.

Is will have the favorite serpent of Dericar Ciorc, the virtuoso.

And you will have this one. It's wound with masking tape to cover some disturbing scenes painted on it; otherwise it's sound.

Take your places.

We entered the conservatory and knelt, each with a horn, at the end of our appointed bands. Servants knelt next to us, ready with our quiet worms.

Presently the drawing-room lights went out. Mr Wayl said, Begin.

The Race

Do: unevenly, the three horns gave the note in the near darkness. The servants placed our worms in the reviving ooze. I watched mine through the green-lighted fringe of the foxtail mat on which I knelt: it lay still. To my left Beatrice Fod urged hers on with whispers, then blew a new note on her serpent—a hesitant semitone.

Patience, said Mr Wayl from the threshold of the drawing room.

There was a faint white light in the greenhouse, barely more than a drifting phosphorescence. My worm curled, untangling the bunched thread at his tip in thin exploratory tentacles that looked like rapid-flowering vine tendrils. His tan body was now a pale whitish green. Moving, he glided quick over the green

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glass in a curious curve. My eyes were already numb from straining in the dim light when he swerved around the first black marker.

Re I sounded clearly; but Beatrice followed only with her faltering C-sharp. There was laughter from the next room. Turning I saw its cause: an old guest sitting in an overstuffed chair nodded drowsily among the onlookers. Some sort of dark blue light had been made to shine on him, and against the faint phosphorescent whiteness that still filled the air he appeared to be covered with thick soot. Despite the laughter, he dozed on.

My zephyr slid swiftly forward. It was then I noticed that the path he had taken was marked by a nearly invisible trail of black: a broken irregular line.

Beatrice, in spite of her worm's advance, could not force her intermittent C-sharp to the desired *re*. Is Fod as yet made no sound. My worm touched the second marker. I played

Mi, followed by a sigh of wonder from the watchers, while under my eyes the worm's black trail suddenly turned a sullen green. Looking up, I saw on the wall beyond the course's finish the prize adze, flashing red in some beam cast on it from an unseen point. The vision was the color of my inner eye! I nearly forgot to follow my worm; and when I next observed him he was already at the third marker.

Fa: my lips and lungs blared the note out while my eyes fixed the fiery adze: but as I played, it dropped abruptly into darkness. Again there was a bustle in the drawing-room. All now looked towards the glass case, placed on a small stand in the center of the room, where the fifteen-pound Slauss sapphire was exposed. The jewel glowed as if illuminated from within: its clarity was now clustered with entwined tenuous red veins. We beheld it thus for a few moments until we heard an unexpected *re* from Is Fod's serpent. As soon as the note was sounded the sapphire turned a translucent black that darkened but did not obscure the red skein within.

When my zephyr attained the fourth marker, I made my only mistake of the race. With *fa* I had unstopped the last of the first set of fingerholes. Between it and the next hole lay the abnormal extent of closed tube that Mr Wayl had mentioned. Uncovering the *fa* hole I tried to compensate for its position by slackening my lips; I only succeeded in producing a faltering *fa diesis*.

Every light was extinguished, even the faint green course-lights. An unusual darkness suffused the conservatory and the

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drawing-room. Without color or light, it seemed to have its own thick splendor; and this impression was confirmed when I found that I could still barely discern the line trailed by the advancing worm. I recognized too that this line formed not a haphazard figure, but letters.

I had forgotten to correct my mistake. Only when the silence that followed the sudden darkness had been broken by the embarrassed coughing of Miss Dryrein (Mr Wayl's secretary) did I remember to play.

Sol: the chocolate-blackness was at once pierced by a moving ray of yellow light.

I call this Midas's finger, said Mr Wayl. And in fact whatever the beam touched acquired the lustre and massiveness of gold. The sapphire, the harmonium, Mr Wayl, Miss Dryrein, and, one by one, all the guests were subjected to the illusory transformation. Ima Mutès, the Catalan *entreteneuse*, was applauded: her evening gown was made of a tightly-coiled spiral of velvet snakes.

The yellow beam was entering the greenhouse when Is Fod sounded his *mi*. The adze again turned a brilliant red. When the yellow ray came to rest on it, its red did not change to gold but deepened in the midst of a golden haze.

The light had proved me right: my worm had left letters in his trail—in the reflected yellow they glowed purple. But I had no time to study them. My worm was at the fifth marker.

La. The adze again disappeared, as well as the moving beam. Instead violet light flooded that drowsy guest whom we had last seen covered with soot. This time the laughter of the other guests roused him, and he opened his eyes, which flashed weirdly, casting thin lilac-colored shafts into the surrounding darkness. A girl cried out, *O Papa, tu m'fais peur!* The old man went back to sleep.

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The worm-letters took on yellowness, while the course was black in the violet glow.

Beatrice uttered a final breath into her serpent: still the same quavering C-sharp, dull whiteness guttering for a moment about the violet guest. Balls! We heard a whirring noise and a brief splintering of glass as Beatrice skied her horn through the conservatory roof. Draughts of February air swirled about us.

My *si* was followed at once by Is Fod's *fa*. Pink flooded the course, its bands turning blue, the leech's trail a brighter yellow. At the end of each band a pool of purple light revealed our worms' goal: spider crabs, with ponderous claws and backs overgrown with trailing parasites. Opposite me the crab, seeing his prey so close, waited, while the one facing Is Fod started at a sluggish pace after his. Beatrice's worm had already been eaten.

I watched the eyestalks of the waiting crab lower. Just as the nippers pinched the slender swerving body Mr Wayl said to me, Finish. The high *do* came satisfactorily forth, the air was filled for a moment with a kind of swimming silver, and finally in greenhouse and drawing-room the lights went on. My eyes were tired and blurred. When they cleared, the course-bands were empty of light, leeches, and crabs. There only remained the trail of triturated food and slime my lost worm had left, broken marks of a shiny blackness among which I recognised certain letters:

e as no s ex rex noth Syl i

Get rid of that, Mr Wayl said to a servant. To me: That was not what I meant. I tried to lay down his food so that he would spell... But the result is nothing—fragments.

The race had lasted an hour. Taking my prize with me, I soon left.

First Inquiries

I found out why Mr Wayl thought my eyes were purple: he was colorblind. Other remarks of his remained obscure—why, for instance, had he felt that I should recognize the song Beatrice had been singing when we left the library? Throughout the evening Mr Wayl had treated me with singular attention. He had shown me the adze privately. From a large company of guests he had chosen me to compete with the two Fods, known to be his only heirs. He had been pleased, and not at all surprised, that I won the contest. Why?

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As Mr Wayl had taken pains to interest me in the images worked on the face of the adze-head, I thought it might be rewarding to learn more about them. So a few days after the party I called Miss Dryrein to ask her for any information she had concerning the adze. While she knew next to nothing herself (Mr Wayl had secreted, in a safety-box to which she had no access, what relevant documents there were), she suggested I consult the former owner of the adze, from whom it had been bought only a few months before.

This person, a minor novelist, at once agreed to see me. I called at his apartment in Bethune Street one evening and there, with a bottle of pisco to maintain us, he told me what he knew.

"The Sores"

It was on a night in the autumn of last year that I came into possession of the adze. Late one afternoon I had gone to the Plaza, where a cocktail party was being given in connection with the publication of one of my books. Perhaps you've read it—a short novel called *The Sores?* It was dark when I left. I was in an impressionable state: I had drunk a lot, and eaten little, and the hours of party talk had left me agitated. I remember standing on the steps of the hotel when I left, suddenly exalted by the cold air and the illuminated city. A sweet restlessness came over me. I decided to hire one of the carriages drawn up on the Park side of 59th Street for a long drive. At first I could not find a willing driver, but one at last agreed to take me out to a Long Island beach. He warned me the trip would last through the night; but I had no objection to that.

We set off, soon crossing the Queensborough Bridge. I'm not sure where we went after that—I think we started out through Maspeth and later skirted South Ozone. I don't know the city well at all, and in any case I was soon sunk in my dreams. I thought about my childhood, women, and the war, I recited poems and sang through scenes of opera, I thought of the future, especially of trips I would like to make to Morocco, to Sweden, to Afghanistan. Later I thought of the evening I had just passed, and finally of my book. I hadn't really thought of the book in a long time, having been too busy proofing it and discussing it with readers, publishers and reviewers. Softly shaken in the slow carriage, I renewed my lost enthusiasm.

It concerns three American men who meet in the restaurant

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of the Copenhagen airport. Their acquaintance begins at the smorgasbord table, where each reveals a taste for bitter pickled onions. All three are waiting for the same flight, a departure for San Francisco across the Arctic Sea. At first they would seem to have nothing more in common. One of them, Jacob Pendastrava, is a sociologist, recently engaged on an inquiry into the variables of joy. Pownoll Toker Williaus is vice-president of a company that manufactures foundation garments, the Press-You-Nigh Stays, Inc. Noah La Vas, the youngest of the three, is an engineer whose specialty is the slowing of high winds. He has recently invented a kind of inverted pendulum which, projected into a wind-channel by powerful hydraulic springs, tends to set up restraining crosscurrents.

Their first conversation lags. Williaus hums nervously to fill the silence. La Vas in surprise recognizes the tune: Why that's *Wehe Wintgen Wehe!* What! says Williaus, You mean... This is too good to be true, adds Pendastrava. They have found a common enthusiasm; they are all three amateurs of old German music. A jubilant discussion of Sweelinck, Schein and Schütz, illustrated with musical examples, lasts until boarding time and through the first hours of flight.

When fatigue overcomes the majority of the passengers (very late in the night, for since it is June the plane is flying in sunlight), the three men, respecting the sleep of their fellow travellers, withdraw to the lounge in the tail of the plane. They too are tired, and they decide to play cards for a while. Pendastrava teaches his friends an antique form of cribbage. They have played for about an hour, and Williaus has just completed his fifteen with a jack of spades, when the cards and markers suddenly swarm in the air around them. Then they themselves are pitched from their chairs as the plane falls. The crash occurs; they find themselves battered but alive. La Vas soon succeeds in getting outside. He finds that the tail section of the plane, broken off from the rest of the fuselage, is resting on a flat expanse of ice. Before him there is a huge hole of black water. There is no sign of any other survivor or wreckage.

Williaus joins La Vas, and the two of them help Pendastrava, whose left leg is broken, down on to the ice. Making him as comfortable as possible, they return to the wreck to see what they can salvage. As the luggage is stored at the very tail-end of the plane, they find plenty of clothes, and also a closetful of blankets. But the galley and its stores, located behind the pilot's cabin, are

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lost. All the food they can find is a half dozen cans and pots of dainties, souvenirs of tourists homeward bound: Strassburg patty, smoked eel, sweetbreads in wine, pickled mushrooms, an Edam cheese, and a bottle of *grappa*. From the remaining contents of the luggage, La Vas and Williaus take several tubes of aspirin, a sheath-knife, a compass, and a pistol (a small .30-caliber automatic) with two boxes of cartridges.

The next concern of the two men is Pendastrava's leg. La Vas proves his ingenuity by disassembling and reshaping the metal tubes out of which the lounge furniture is made. From them, with the aid of belts and wire, he constructs a huge splint. Shaped like a U with one side greater than the other, this splint, fitted into the groin and armpit of the injured man, not only keeps his leg rigid but also serves as a fixed crutch, enabling him to stand without having his leg touch the ground or support his body's weight.

Everything to be taken from the plane is brought out, for the wrecked tail is slowly sinking through the ice. The three men consider their situation. They decide that since a search will surely be made to discover the fate of their plane, they should stay next to the wreck, where they have a better chance of being seen from the air, until it sinks. On the other hand, they decide to prepare for the worst, that is, for a long trek southward over the ice in case they are not soon rescued. Thus the small amount of food at their disposal is to be severely rationed, and a part, the can of eel, set aside for use as fishbait. Seawater is to be drunk from the start to avoid the harmful effects it might have if taken after prolonged thirst.

Most of the day has passed. Williaus spends the early evening preparing a tent out of blankets. La Vas fishes in the hole made by the sunken plane, but he has no luck. The morale of the men is good, tired as they are. Only Pendastrava shows any signs of despondency—his leg has been hurting him considerably. Even he becomes cheerful after a swallow of *grappa*. The three men sing *Ein fester Burg ist unser Gott*, in Schütz's harmonization. They feel no touch of loneliness in that lifeless tract of raw whiteness, but sleep well through the sunny night, La Vas and Williaus taking turns to watch.

The morning of the next day passes without event. The weather is bright and mild. La Vas explores the vicinity of their camp, finding nothing. Williaus fishes for several hours without success. Pendastrava rests; his leg bothers him less.

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At midday a fire of sorts is made, and the can of sweetbreads is heated and half eaten.

During the afternoon an airplane, flying at about a thousand feet, passes many miles to the north of them. Of the several search planes sent out, this is the only one the survivors ever see.

The following day Pendastrava makes his first attempt to walk, but is obliged to give up after a few steps. His general condition has nonetheless improved.

On the afternoon of the fifth day the tail wreckage disappears. The hole it leaves is separated by only a few feet from the larger one caused by the crash; the two holes soon become one. The men decide to abandon their efforts to catch fish, preserving their bait for richer waters.

The next day, the sixth, the pot of gooseliver patty is opened, the mushrooms, as well as the sweetbreads, having been finished. Pendastrava, who is exhausted by the few steps he has managed to take earlier in the day, vomits the small share of patty he swallows. This causes the first break in morale since the crash: La Vas looses his temper and berates Pendastrava for his weakness and stupidity. Pendastrava answers feebly but bitterly.

In the course of the afternoon Williaus tries to reconcile his companions. He evidently succeeds. That night, however, at the hour when the three men usually sang together, Pendastrava refuses to join them. His excuse is that he cares too much for the music, which requires four voices, to like hearing it botched by three. But it is his silence that makes the singing impossible: La Vas and Williaus soon give up their sad duet. For the first time the three find the lifeless silence heavy, and the night sun sharp. All sleep little.

Matters do not improve next morning. A running argument begins between La Vas and the other men. La Vas insists that they start southward at once since a week has already passed and the efforts to find them have probably been abandoned: they must cover ground while they still have some food. The others feel that the departure must be postponed as long as possible so that Pendastrava's injured leg may heal—otherwise, how can they make any worthwhile progress?

The discussion is interminable and pointless. The three men are starting to get weak, not so much from the lack of nourishment as from exposure. The glare of ice and sun is wrecking their eyes, and making them suffer from almost uninterrupted headaches. The consumption of seawater, minimal but constant, has also had

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its effect in the pain and cramp that molest their bowels. They are no longer reasonable and only La Vas has much energy for facing the problems of their predicament. The other two—especially Pendastrava—prefer to take refuge in a lethargic hope of rescue.

The senseless argument immobilizes the survivors. Scoring small points in the harangues becomes their main preoccupation, each man clinging to his point of view in spite of fact or need. La Vas is absurdly brutal during the first days of the argument, when Pendastrava's leg is in truth unfit for a day's march; while to safeguard the importance of his injury, the latter will not exercise his leg even when he feels capable of doing so. Williaus, in his role of nurse and protector, seconds this passivity.

It is not until six more days have passed that the three men break camp and start south. There is practically no more food: they have finished the eel, except for two slivers kept as bait, and nearly half the Edam cheese.

Nevertheless the departure is a boon for their spirits. Pendastrava is heroic in his efforts to advance, while the other two work in relay to help him and, during the rests, to take care of him. By evening they have advanced seven miles, according to La Vas's estimate. Although they are too tired to speak much, a new fellowship unites them.

The following day, the fifteenth after the crash, Pendastrava's condition permits them to cover only about five miles. A long rest is salutary: a march of eight miles is made the next day, ten the day after that, and this average is kept up for two days more. The travellers observe a few seabirds, too distant to shoot at.

On the morning of the twentieth day, Pendastrava takes a hard fall on the ice. His leg hurts him terribly when he resumes his march. He is obliged to rest every two or three minutes and can advance only several hundred yards in an hour. The day's march is of less than three miles, only one mile having been covered after his fall.

Pendastrava is worse the next morning: his leg is swollen and sore. Even helped by his companions he is hardly able to walk at all, and the other men are far too weak to carry him. They barely advance a mile in nine hours. By that time the men are frantic with fatigue and despair. Pendastrava is in continual pain. He refuses to speak to the others.

During the night Pendastrava filches and eats the remaining morsel of cheese. His act is discovered at noon the next day, after five hours of painful meager progress. La Vas begins kicking the

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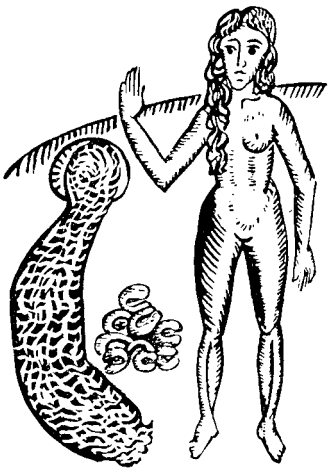

prostrate Pendastrava. When Williaus intervenes, La Vas knocks him down.

In the middle of the afternoon, during a prolonged rest, La Vas takes Williaus aside. He apologizes for having struck him, and goes on to give his view of their predicament: the only way out is to abandon Pendastrava. With him they will starve; without him, there is a chance that the two of them will reach the edge of the Arctic basin where they will find a plenty of fish and birds. Since it is inhuman to leave Pendastrava to die slowly, he should be shot. La Vas offers to do this, and asks Williaus to give him the pistol. Williaus refuses, wishing to think over the other's plan.

The march is resumed. When it is his turn to help Pendastrava, Williaus lets La Vas go a ways ahead of them. He then tells Pendastrava of La Vas's plan. Pendastrava demands the gun, and Williaus gives it to him. The sun is low, and a soft wind rises.

Williaus calls La Vas to take his turn with the injured man. Setting Pendastrava down on the ice, Williaus draws a few steps away, and stands turned away from the others. He hears La Vas cry out and looking around sees that Pendastrava is aiming the gun not at La Vas, but at him. La Vas runs slowly towards Pendastrava; Williaus screams; Pendastrava aims but holds his fire. When Pendastrava finally becomes aware of La Vas's approach, he turns the pistol towards him and shoots him through the chest. The stricken man falls on Pendastrava. Williaus's terror of Pendastrava changes to infinite anger and he runs whimpering to punish him. The latter is pinned beneath the dying La Vas and cannot

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even speak. Williaus strikes and scratches at his face. At last, seeing the gun lying on the ice where it has slid from Pendastrava's hand, he crawls to get it and returns to strike Pendastrava repeatedly in the face with the gun butt. Pendastrava struggles helplessly, trapped under La Vas's body. He is soon killed by the blows.

Shaking and exhausted, Williaus collapses on the ice near the two bodies. He lies there for almost three hours. He cannot find the strength to decide to get up. When he finally does, he leaves without looking at the others, keeping only his blankets and the pistol.

He does not rest until late that night. From now on he pays no more attention to the time of day, but walks when he can and rests when he must. He rests very often. He is now so weak that he cannot advance more than four or five miles a day. Since he has left the compass in La Vas's pocket, his progress south is even slower than this.

Twenty-five days have passed since the plane crash. Williaus talks to himself silently as he walks. He talks also (but silently still) to others. Curiously enough—he apologizes for his lapse—he cannot pronounce certain words, those that end in -ion. At first he can pronounce all their syllables except the last. Consternat, ambit—his groping tongue fails. Later he has difficulty pronouncing any part of such words. He tries pretending to think of other words and his mind then comes close to filling the hiatus. But when he springs towards the forgotten word there is only a ridiculous fragment—vat, sump—or a void.

He has seen birds more frequently, although only singly. He decides to start trying to shoot them. He notices that one of the birds seems to be following him—not only following but drawing closer with each succeeding hour. It is a rather large bird, of a sooty blue, which he recognizes as a noddy—the silly bird that is afraid of nothing. He cannot understand how this bird could have come so far north. He feels a strange hope seeing it.

When the bird is hovering about ten yards over his head, Williaus begins shooting at it. He misses repeatedly. The bird is not frightened and continues its daylong descent.

Williaus leaves off shooting at the bird when it is a few feet from him. Not only are his shots useless, but the noddy appears like an angelic companion to him. The bird flies lower and lower, the undersides of its wings unnaturally white.

On the morning of the twenty-seventh day the white-sooty wings brush Williaus's face. He thinks: The foolish noddy, un-

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afraid of man. The bird rises a little in the air only to cover his face again with its wings. He is snowblind.

Williaus does not at first understand what has happened to him. He walks through universal whiteness until he falls. After that he crawls for a while.

The noddy has not left him, but hovers in his unblinded mind. The bird darkens, the curious whiteness of its wings gathers to a ball in its beak, a quartzlike globe. An amethyst pupil completes the eye, which regards Williaus inquiringly but without much emotion. Then it begins to sing. (Williaus can tell it is the eye singing by the listening aspect of the bird.) It sings such lines as:

O Johnny O Johnny O

At the end of each song the noddy flies out of sight for a moment, bearing the eye, but soon comes back.

After a while Williaus asks if the eye could not sing an old song. The eye, with a look of surprise, consents to render *Come away, come sweet love*. But it insits on preceding each return to the old music with several popular songs.

By the end of the twenty-eighth day Williaus has given himself over to death. The lustrous voice fades. At a certain moment he becomes aware of a being close to him. He calls out, but hears only a rubbery clatter. Pulling the glove from his right hand, he stretches it towards the sound: a cold softness fills his palm. He leans farther: bones and silky whiskers, and a sweet whine. A new soft clatter, and the being's body moves against him. The seal puts his head on Williaus's lap who strokes it tenderly.

From time to time the seal moves away but usually Williaus can follow the flapping of its feet, or its short grunts. Once it goes far away but after a long hour returns. Williaus caresses it with happy relief. So doing he finds that the seal's smooth pelisse is rent with sores. His fingers explore the open wounds, the animal trembles at this touching. Williaus weeps, repeating Poor Roly, poor Roly, soothing its head. He weeps obliviously over the wet soft sores.

When the seal next starts to move away, Williaus pleads with it to stay. He cannot think how to keep it by him. Then remembering that music is attractive to seals, he begins to sing:

The first queen was a farmer's girl
With hair as yellow as hay,
She slept one night with the emperor
The emperor died next day

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The third queen was a heathen
The fairest of all houris,
She danced for the devil's salva

Vat

La lala

Williaus's body was carried by icedrift to the nearby edge of the polar pack, and thence, the ice breaking up, floated southward into the Atlantic on an iceberg. At summer's end it was observed by the passengers of Mr Leigh Smith's yacht *Diana*. The body, recovered, was brought to Canada aboard that ship, and there Williaus's family took charge of it, returning with it to Los Angeles where the remains were burned.

Gypsies

A soothing rush of waves had washed through the close of my recital. It was past midnight when the carriage stopped at the beach.

Someone outside opened the carriage-door and the beam of a flashlight entered. There was laughter from many men and women: I had been smoking a ninety-five-cent foot-long cigar, and the light discovered me in a heap of smoke.

Such ash! said the man with the flashlight. My suit was thoroughly sprinkled with cigar droppings.

A sable silvered, I answered.

A silver Stewart?

Royally bearded! I said, feeling my stubbled chin.

Did you say: beheaded?

Purged by pickled hominy!

My questioner, helping me to the ground, laughed delightedly at my last answer. Taking my arm he led me towards the nearest of the campfires burning along the beach. We passed through a score of watching Gypsies.

When we had reached the fire my questioner shined his light on a trail of ashes pointing to my carriage. We were expecting you, he said, by this sign of the wind.

My polite smile revealed my skepticism. I have never seen such indignation. Protests from all sides persuaded me to submit to an

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experiment, although I feared that it would only bring new embarrassment.

From somewhere beyond the firelight a Gypsy girl trundled a strange machine. It was made of two large flared cones of corrugated iron set one above the other. The lower one's base rested close to the ground on a ring of free wheels. The upper cone, joined to the lower by a tube in a way allowing each to revolve independently, was set at right-angles to the first, its base, shut with a flat metal disc, facing outwards: it looked like the horn of some outsize Edison phonograph. The machine must have been seven feet high, and the diameter of the cones at their bases four feet; the short tube connecting them was only three inches thick at its narrowest point.

After unlocking three hooks on its surface, the girl swung out a large section of the lower cone together with the corresponding arc of the wheel-ring, and the machine was then pushed into position over the campfire, raked into a compact blazing heap of coals. During the moment the cone was open, I saw that its inner surface was covered with a spiral of close-set blackened vanes.

While the machine was being fetched, several Gypsy men had dug a shallow circular ditch around the fire, afterwards wetting it with buckets of seawater. The ring of wheels now rested in this trough of relatively firm sand.

All now drew back to a distance of ten yards from the fire, except for the girl who had fetched the machine. Turning the upper cone towards the sea, from which a steady wind blew, she removed the disc that sealed its base, and withdrew at once to the circle of watchers. The upper cone, which was evidently hollow, swung slightly to left and right before settling into place facing the wind. Slowly at first, the lower cone began to spin on its ring of wheels. A harsh whispering noise started, thickening and rising with the pace of the cone's gyration.

When the lower cone had reached a speed I would not have thought possible, so pronounced that its wheels had become a blur (it is true that the only light was that of the hidden fire), the machine's movements changed. The upper cone, previously immobile, started to revolve as the lower cone slowed. In a few seconds their roles had been reversed, the lower cone remaining still while the upper whirled violently. But I had barely accustomed myself to this transformation when with a grinding crack all motion stopped, and the upper cone, which had come to its abrupt halt facing me, spouted a dazzling stream of coals. These

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when they fell rested for the merest instant in bright continuous lines: I read the word THESAURUS. At once the coals began to wink out, hissing damply. Five seconds after having seen the word I began doubting my eyes, confronted as I now was with only scattered embers, bearing as much resemblance to that word as a constellation to the legendary figures it portrays.

A shout from the Gypsies followed the word's appearance. I was ready enough to admit my error; but nobody was thinking any longer of that argument. Instead I was told that I must enter a contest with the leading men of the community. Since everyone was immediately busy preparing for this event, I was obliged to accept—especially as I had put myself so completely in the wrong.

I learned that the stake in the game was to be an extraordinary heirloom—in fact the treasure signified by "thesaurus"—but I was not yet told what it was. First of all I was to witness a special dance, a preliminary meant to emphasize the ritual character of the game.

We formed a new circle around the campfire. Soon music began. A crank victrola played the worn record of an old popular song. This music had a curious complement. Three women held strips of wetted white cloth and snapped them in turn, thus making a series of resounding retorts that possessed a certain rough element of pitch. The three strips were of unequal length: the middle-size one was only slightly longer than the shortest strip, while the longest was nearly its double. At long intervals that seemed to have no connection with the recorded music, the women would flick their cloths in rapid succession: first that of middle length, then the longest, finally the shortest.

Presently the dancers appeared—a handsome couple wearing only bathing suits, shaking with cold. The man crouched on the ground. The woman performed a solo during which she strewed over her partner bands of charred newspaper from a basket placed nearby. Once she had thoroughly covered the man and the ground around him, the woman withdrew. The man soon began to lift himself up. As he tried to shake off the papers, however, he became more and more entangled in them. I saw after a moment how the effect was achieved. A net had been laid on the spot where he had squatted, concealed by a light covering of sand, and he had picked it up when he rose. The strands of the net, furthermore, must have been dipped in strong glue, for the papers stuck to them firmly. After many elegant contortions, the dancer, wrapped from head to toe in a shroud of newsprint, fell on

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to the sand as if dead. The music's close marked the end of the dance.

It was then that my questioner with the flashlight—who turned out to be a chief—showed me the stake the Gypsies had put up for our game. It was nothing other than the "adze," as they called it—of course I pointed out that it wasn't an adze at all but a kind of short-handled halberd, or a large billhook. While they granted that it rather resembled such instruments, they insisted that it was an adze, and no ordinary one. The chief explained that the pictures engraved on its head portrayed the life of some ancient wonder-queen of theirs, from her birth to her burning. Then he and several other men discussed the last scene shown on it—the one with moon, arrows, and fish—which they couldn't understand, still less agree on.

Next I was asked to put up *my* stake. I was at a loss. A hundred times the money I was carrying would not have bought the adze's gold, and then there was its symbolic value, which I gathered was the Gypsies' paramount reason for offering it up to chance. At last, reluctantly, I drew from my overcoat pocket my beloved dog Limnisse and announced my willingness to risk him. This extraordinary animal, bought three years previously at a secondhand dog-store on the Left Bank, was only four inches long and weighed only six ounces fed. But his brain, a marvel of nature, was equal to that of any Alsatian shepherd. When I bought him, a veteran circus roustabout had already trained him to perform such feats as measuring all distances from a foot to a mile with a margin of error of only one sixteenth of an inch.

My hosts were delighted with Limnisse, and so the game finally started. It was played at another fire, over which a twenty-five gallon vat of water had been set to boil on a cast-iron tripod. The boiling water was funneled from a spigot into terracotta jars that, excepting a small hole left for this purpose, were entirely closed. The filled jars, borne on wooden trays by Gypsy girls, were passed in turn to the contestants who took them in their bare hands. Before setting his jar down, the contestant had to describe the scene moulded on its top. If he dropped a jar, or put it on the ground without giving a fitting description, he was out of the game. When only two players remained, this procedure ended. Instead, the finalists joined in a kind of rhetorical contest, explaining the transcendent meaning of the scenes they had already described.

I was shown a sample jar-top. Its picture was the same as the

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second one of the adze. The trick, the chief told me, is to use the fewest words possible, without sacrificing good usage or leaving out any part of the picture. In this case you might say, The lightningpucked thundergaming hockeyists felled, our queen on cloud is admired.

I promised to do my best.

Looking back, I am sure that at least part of the game was prepared. Before I had had five turns a dozen contestants—all but the chief and I—had managed either to drop their jars or to stutter unnaturally when their turn came. I can't remember half of what they did say, so I shall limit myself to us two finalists. I wasn't able, of course, to see the chief's jars: I can only report his words.

It was he who opened the game, saying of the first jar: A mast bears fruit for shipwrecked travellers.

I was nearly eliminated at my first turn. When I took the offered jar, in spite of all my inner preparations, its boiling heat blinded me. My vision fortunately cleared quickly enough to distinguish the crudely made image: a child was curled up, as if in the womb, within a circle on whose outer edge grew trees, shrubs and crops, all on fire. I said: The old world, burning, heralds the new one to be born.

The dialogue continued thus:

The chief: For gay gangs crossing, the sea's a velvet field.

Of a group of nine men on their knees, clubs laid aside, I said: Victorious Yankees pray for humility.

The chief: From the dead god's eye swarm fat swine.

My next scene showed two men, one of them looking in amazement at the other, who was chiselling at the bust of an old man set in the middle of a fence. I said of it: Confounding Brunelleschi, Donatello carves a venerable God from a fencepost.

The chief: Cool drink in hand, Somerset Maugham is gently toothdrilled. (I objected to "toothdrilled" but was overruled.)

Next I had to describe a picture in the upper half of which a pianist with fluttering hair regarded a cross, while below a plump bearded man engaged in tourney with an opponent in side whiskers and velvet clothes. My description was: Brahms and Wagner joust for fame, but Liszt plays only for Jesus.

The chief: Joyous giants make, of bankcolumns, flutes.

And I, considering a prisoner who sang and played a mandolin while his guard stood by with ready whip, concluded: The punished liar sings a new song of truth.

The chief and I were now the only contestants, and we entered

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the final period of the game—the rhetorical summary of our descriptions. The chief spoke first.

The mast, and the flutes, the sea, the tooth, the eye, the eye, the tooth, the sea, the flutes, the mast: in in these there five all symbols it's we see have you a so glimpse meant into nicely the quite world here that but we Square all Washington yearn around for, of that anarchists paradise pleasant on the earth to of happens which as all literature prophets such from of Isaiah readers to to Virgil familiar to conception you a and bankcolumns me of have out sung—flutes that the world care in medical which painless pain and and comfortable fear as have well been as banished, luxurious where free plenty of is picture insured touching and a when tooth we Maugham's will Mr finally mention have to the forgot opportunity I to kaput promote world a old democratic the interest i.e. in god the dead fine the arts. Of is knowledge it is not that fitting eye that the this from new course age of should symbolically be proceeding first home heralded brought by easily the be miracle to that bacon saved the those by classic indicated victims as of notably pity, eat travellers to wrecked plenty on also a but barren all shore? To but available soon be plights advantages like negativistic theirs these will will have only been not forever foidermore banished—traverse the to sea desiring itself tread will baby lose merest its the periculousness, for being velvet transformed comfy to soft soft to comfy transformed velvet being for periculousness the its merest lose baby will tread itself desiring sea to the traverse. Banished foidermore forever—but enough! Glimpse so a you have see we it's symbols all five there, in the mast, the sea, the eye, the tooth, and the flutes!

There was considerable applause. In turn I rose to speak.

Eak! ay! irth! ine! ees! ost! er! ire! ird! ine! ew!

ladies gentlemen, tongue phrases. rhetoric day. man's glory earth, birth—birth goodness, light nature. men arms, knees strength humility's. sculptor glory god fencepost. tones flesh hands register. justice, liar (word) rack whip fire music bird. wonders seas swine, mercy wisdom flame—world.

is to wrap speak; say is to say keep; shown, tell—began to shine; laid, fell, prayed, be; felt was made spring; knew to stir confined; was (murdered) forced to bear to sing; is bring to view; is;

weak another come stranger divine burning all brave most mere weak upper merciful wretched twisted fair true velvet milling blessed divine such new greater,

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and and but when and, when and and or, or but or but and,
in for on of, of to from with, to with with,
a the the, the the a th', the a the, the,
I me you, I you he, he he I,
plainly briefly there up down, but even not like not,
my my, their their, their his, his his,
let, have been, shall, had, was
what, what, who, that,
which?

—That I leave to you.

Cheers rose about the fire at my last words. There was no question as to who was winner, and the chief immediately congratulated me.

It is a new triumph, he said, of analytical poetry over descriptive prose. This reassured me—I was afraid my couplets might have passed unnoticed.

Dawn had begun to lighten the smoky beach when I started back to New York, with the awarded adze on my lap tied up in *Mirror* and string. Although I had won, it had been necessary for me to abandon my dog—evidently the stakes are exchanged in such cases, there being, according to those people, no such thing as a winner. So, giving him a last center slice of his favorite filet mignon, I said goodbye to Limnisse. It was the only bad moment of that diverting and exhausting night.

Several months later I sold the adze to Wayl, who had shown extraordinary interest in it, finally offering me more money than I could refuse.

Two o'clock in the morning had struck when the novelist finished his story. Tired, I suggested we meet another time to talk about the adze itself, and thanking him for his kindness, left.

Mr Wayl's Will

At six-thirty that morning a visitor woke me up: Beatrice Fod. Pale with fatigue, she nevertheless harangued me vigorously for several minutes. She wanted the adze, first claiming it as rightly hers and then, such arguments failing, offering me increasingly large amounts of money for it. Her final price was close to a million dollars—I have forgotten the exact sum because my mind at that time was aswim with sleep and surprise.

She was on her way out when another caller appeared: her

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brother Isidore, showing signs of the same tempestuous weariness.

Nĕgat jegů! he exclaimed.

Tsamp! she answered, shoving past him out the door. *Gego szegák egan egámpteggi egög segöl!*

Is Fod soon followed her, equally disappointed in his efforts to get the adze for himself.

In the afternoon papers I learned that Mr Wayl had died the previous night. Soon afterwards I received a special delivery letter from Mr Wayl's lawyers asking me to come to his house next morning to attend the reading of the dead man's will.

Although I had arrived before the appointed time, a remarkable number of people had already gathered in the familiar drawing-room, where the reading was to take place. Among them I recognized Mayor Groncz. He was, I later learned, the only person invited to the session outside the Fods, Miss Dryrein, and myself. I noticed many other distinguished figures: from medical circles, the surgeon Arbalast, who had once operated on Mr Wayl's foot but was better known for his Harrow depth technique; the gynecologist White; Dr Mallarmé, the woman who had revolutionized narcoanalysis with intravenous injections of "symbolic gin"; and Clematis, the "truth dentist"; two of Mr Wayl's rare friends in the worlds of finance and business, Alexander Senfl of Medusa Natural Gas and Harvey Taylor of Milton Can, in earnest conversation with Jonathan Writch, the president of Blackwards, Reyrdin & Long; numerous leaders in the field of civic development—the chairman of the Parking Authority, the real estate king William Lemon, and the architect Miles Mazurovsky, among others; half-a-dozen aspiringly alert but unfamiliar lawyers under the wing of an anonymous redhaired dean; Philippa Stuart, elder of the Primal Rose Unitarians—the only religious figure of the gathering; among the military, Generals Peirce O'Toole, who had distinguished himself during the last war in reducing the "pocket bulge," and Quogue, the "Bremen Monster"; Admiral "Rock" Hatter, and Captain Hershey, who had never become admiral (despite a brilliant record) because of his lifelong skepticism towards the torpedo; several politicians besides Mayor Groncz—Governor Gold of Delaware, author of a book (*Mass or Mess?*) that had angered many Catholics, Senator Cousins, whose promising legal career was ending in political mediocrity, and Senator Autobustard, the royalist; many writers and journalists, including the poet Felix Hughes (*The Artifice of Order*), "Sylvester" of *Field & Stream*, and the cartoonist Flamingo Stahl, for whom

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the epithet "vitriolic" had been worn to new thinness; from the theatrical world, Laetitius Scott, the backer of an avant-garde sleeper that had recently opened on Fire Island, *Invitation to a Sabbath*; Violet Colt, directress of the China Co.'s film subsidiaries, whose stinginess was legendary; Archibald Moon, then at the height of his powers as Judas in *The White Net*; and his wife Anna Joyce who had distinguished herself in a role of "trying piety" playing opposite him; the art dealer Seaward Blackmaster and his principal client, Edward Emord, both probably hoping to learn how Mr Wayl had disposed of Watteau's *Blue Friend*; Duane Greene; the museum director Peggy Reader; such members of the musical world as Demuro Bangcraft and Reobard Mitrostone; and a few of the many painters once patronized by Mr Wayl—de Crook (who had painted his "purple portrait"), Huffing (the exponent of *arte brutta*), Rauschfart and Litotes.

The consensus of this assembly was that Mr Wayl's fortune exceeded three hundred million dollars.

The Fods, accompanied by Miss Dryrein, at last took their seats (Beatrice shouting Vampires! Vampires! as she crossed the room). A pale attorney, flanked by bespectacled aides, read the will behind a massive table placed in front of the high windows that looked on the conservatory.

I, GRENT OUDE WAYL, of the City, County, and State of New York, do make, publish, and declare this to be my Last Will and Testament, hereby revoking any and all Wills and Codicils theretofore made by me.

FIRST: I direct that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid by my executrix as soon as possible after my decease, provided that the following procedure be adhered to:

1) That the organist of St James's Church, Madison Avenue and 71st Street, Manhattan, choose a suitable musical composition to accompany the departure of my remains to their place of burial; that the score of this composition (notes, rests, clefs, key-and-time-signatures, and all indications of speed, phrasing and dynamics) be reproduced at fifteen times its printed size in the form of pancakes; and that these cakes be obligatorily eaten by any and all such persons who attend the reading of this my Last Will and Testament excepting those specifically invited thereto. (In the event of noncompliance with this provision, I have instructed my faithful servant Miss Gabrielle Dryrein, of 2980 Valentine Avenue, The Bronx, to give to the press all information kept in my private files concerning liable parties.)

2) That I be buried with my ninety-nine year custombuilt Fil Pathétique fob watch, this watch to be set at Greenwich time and placed in

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my left waistcoat pocket immediately prior to the funeral service.

3) That my coffin be taken from St James's Church at eleven o'clock of the Monday morning following my death, on an open cart drawn by two grey donkeys, and that the itinerary of the procession be as follows: Madison Avenue from 71st until 59th Street; Fifth Avenue from 59th until 50th Street; Park Avenue from 50th until 34th Street; and thence to my residence where my remains are to be buried. (In the event of non-compliance with this provision, the following article of this Will is automatically annulled.)

SECOND: I give and bequeath to Mr Lambeth Groncz, of Gracie House, Gracie Square, Manhattan, such land as I possess in the City of New York, notably a park of three acres adjoining my present residence, 457 East 34th Street, Manhattan.

THIRD: I give and bequeath to my faithful servant Miss Gabrielle Dryrein, of 2980 Valentine Avenue, The Bronx:

1) The sum of Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars ($250,000.);

2) The sum of One Hundred Thousand Dollars ($100,000.) to be distributed at her discretion among those who are, or who have been, in her service;

3) All of my personal effects, including clothing, jewelry, silver, furniture, furnishings, books, pictures and ornaments.

FOURTH: All the rest, residue and remainder of my property, real, personal and mixed, wheresoever situate, including property of any description of which I may die seized or possessed, of which I may have power to dispose, over which I may have power of appointment, and in and to which I may be in any manner interested or entitled, I give, devise and bequeath to such person as has in his possession a golden adze hereunder described and who is able to provide a satisfactory explanation of its meaning, purport, uses and significance, now and at all times, the said explanation to be verified by my executrix or by such executors as she may appoint according to the answers given by any qualifying person to the following three questions:

1) When was a stone not a king?

2) What was *La Messe de Sire Fadevant*?

3) Who shaved the Old Man's Beard?

The description of the adze followed. Read with rising voice by the shamefaced lawyer, it was quickly drowned in a clamor of shock and disappointment.

Mr Wayl was never buried at all. His instructions were faithfully carried out, even to the eating of the transcribed music. The organist at St James's, who had planned a twenty-nine minute *Tragic Rhapsody* of Widor, was warned of the consequences and changed to a unison version of *O God Our Help in Ages Past*; so that

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the forced feeders had only twenty-eight notes to swallow between them, and—the hymn being all in wholenotes and halfnotes—hollow ones at that.

The procession following the funeral service caused the worst traffic jam in New York's history, and Mayor Groncz might have been impeached for having allowed such a situation to arise, if he had not announced his intention of giving the land he had inherited to the city. The drawn cart had completed about three quarters of the itinerary when, at the corner of Park Avenue and 49th Street, in the midst of a throng of the idle, the curious and the infuriated, the coffin exploded. Little harm was done to bystanders by the explosion itself, since the coffin was made of welded steel; but the panic resulting from the noise and the strange rain of white petals that fell across the crowded intersection led to one death and many injuries. Investigators concluded, after considering the powdery contents of the coffin, that Mr Wayl's watch had triggered the tragic detonation.

[*To solve the three riddles on which my inheritance depended, I undertook two courses of action: on the one hand, research at official sources for information concerning the so-called adze, and on the other, seeking out Mr Wayl's surviving relatives. I first visited Beatrice and Isidore Fod (the only blood-relations), who received me courteously but to no end. After their show of greed, they seemed resigned to their monotonous lives, which they led in complete retirement, following scandals that had ruined their exceptional careers. Mr Wayl had supported them on the condition that each observe and note everything the other did: and the brother and sister seemed too absorbed in their habit of mutual spying to think of getting the inheritance for themselves.*

My next visit, to the gangster Allen Cavallo, was equally unfruitful.

Information then came to me that the adze had been imported from Alloa, Scotland. Deciding to explore the matter there, I took advantage of my trip to visit Mr Wayl's European relatives—in Paris, Purkinje, in prison since the Panarchist uprising of 1911: in London, the Voe-Doge brothers. All refused any conversation with me whatsoever. I regretted this particularly in the case of the Voe-Doges, for in their drawing-room hung a painting, signed with the initials F. N., whose design was identical with the third scene of the adze; but the painting's title was The Crowning of the King. *I decided to proceed to Scotland.*]

The Customs House (1)

That very night I took the train for Edinburgh, going on the following morning to Alloa. There I went straight to the customs office. My inquiries regarding the adze led me through many

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bureaux; and it was not until late afternoon that the relevant papers were found. I was then informed that the adze had been registered for export not at Alloa itself, but at a special customs house near Alva, a small town three miles to the north.

Early the following morning I therefore set out anew. Reaching Alva by bus, I walked the last mile to the customs house through wet fields. After about a quarter of an hour I heard a sound of voices singing, and they grew louder as I followed my path. To my surprise the music was a partsong written in antique counterpoint, poignant and smooth. The moving voices hid the text, and it was only at the end of the verses that I caught the words of a chordal refrain:

White silver, blue,
Sweet silver, silver sweet!

The autumn mist kept me from seeing whence this music came until I found myself a few yards from a building above whose door hung a worn sign, *The Customs House of Alva*. Superceding this was a sixteen-inch loudspeaker pouring forth, with uncanny realism, the madrigal I had been listening to.

The door had neither bell nor knocker, only a risp, and this stuck. My efforts to work it, however, showed the door to be unlatched and I passed through it into a sad small entrance of drab wood, containing only a table with dried-out inkwell and an empty chair. Certain slight sounds from an adjacent room came through a frail door directly beyond the table. I knocked, had no answer, tried the knob, opened the door and entered a larger room. At first I could not see how large, for the air was suffused with plumes and tiers of smoke bluetinged with the illumination of a sizeable skylight; but once my eyes had grown used to the foggy atmosphere I discovered a kind of gallery in front of me, ten yards wide and forty deep, its windowless walls lined with shelves, and its floor piled with cases and boxes. In a far corner a small area had been partitioned off, and a bright electric glow came through its open door.

Several weaker, unshaded lamps stood in the center of the room, and by their light a dozen officials were reading. They wore purplish military uniforms with visored caps and riding-boots, but their bearing was unsuited to their dress. On a ring of overstuffed sofas they slackly sprawled, each smoking a long fair *regalia* which when sufficiently reduced was replaced from a litter of open cigarboxes that lay among them on the floor—no doubt

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seized contraband. In the same fashion each official exchanged from time to time the book he read for one chosen from a jumbled crateful at his feet. A side of the bookcrate had the word *Confiscated* stenciled on it.

None of the customs-officials took any notice of me when I came in, and when I asked for their attention they did not even look up. Occasionally they spoke a word or two to each other in the soft speech of the country. After I had watched them restlessly for ten minutes, one finally raised himself languorously from his comfort (scratching his jowls with a piercing sound of grated fat and bristle), and approached me. He asked me my business in a brutal but imperfect German accent put on for the occasion. I presented an explanatory note from the Alloa customs office. He pointed to an empty place on one of the sofas and motioned to me to sit there, then disappeared with my letter into the partitioned corner at the end of the room.

I followed his order. Despite the cigarsmoke, richer than ever, I now saw that the customs officials were all reading imperial quarto books, whose covers, entirely taken up with photographs, had no title. A sample from the crate on the floor revealed this

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titlepage: The Complete Erotic Poetry/of/Asafu Zir-jamah/Translated into English Verse/by/Julia Tilt/volume LXXVIII/Printed for the Translatrix/by/The Felicitas Press/Schruns. Leafing through I observed that the poems' line endings proceeded in alphabetical order from poem to poem, from the opening limerick (with the rhymes *mamma*, *pyjama*, *diva*, *Godiva*, *Dalai Lama*) to the closing sestina (*Liz*, *fuzz*, *buzzbuzz*, *Oz*, *Jazz*, *Alcatraz*).

The photographs adorning the covers—one on the front, one on the back—were peculiar to each volume. The sample I examined indicated no clear relation between picture and text. On one of its sides, a tall bottle labelled *Bols* stood on a table near an ivory mallet. A slight protuberance appeared in the smooth glass about halfway up one side of the bottle, and here the liquid within, otherwise clear, had a certain opaqueness. The other cover showed a multilevel safe, whose doors, fitted with combination locks, bore such labels as: Lust, Hunger, Alcoholism, Filial Love.

The book read by the official who sat beside me was illustrated with similarly insignificant photographs.

I could see, on the front cover to my right, a room whose chartered walls suggested a doctor's office. It was empty except for an armchair made out of wax; this chair was indented in every part by the marks of human teeth that had bitten hard into its substance. The back of the same volume portrayed another room, furnished as a salon. I cannot be sure of my interpretation, but it seemed that an abstract mosaic embedded in one of the walls had begun to proliferate—the other walls, part of the floor, and even much of the furniture were covered with a layer of tesserae that appeared to be spreading over them like ambitious grass.

Many minutes passed with no sign of the official who had borne off my letter. My gaze, straying across the shelves of books that stretched the length of one wall, stopped at a sign reading: *Seized at the request of the Earl of Mar*. I wondered how any private person, even noble, could exercise such a power. I asked my neighbor, who had an odd B-shaped mole on his cheek, if he would satisfy my curiosity on this point—and to my surprise he assented. More, my question roused several other lazing officials.

Nine of them gathered round me. Under their glittering visors their faces looked soft and old and filled with the resignations of old barflies.

This custms hous (one said) was bilt in the sixtenth centry to tax the metl producd by the Silvr Glen of Alva, whch blonged then, as now, to the Erls of Mar.

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The Arls (the second haltingly took up) in llowing his ax to be mposed on the roduce of heir orkings, tipulated hat in eturn hey be iven ertain rivileges.

The' wer firs of al (the third whisperingly intervened) themselve to exercis thei contro on al o th good comin into thi regio of Scotlan, fixin and levyin tariff as the'chos.

Furthermo (the fourth scratching his pate added) they were allow to appoi the officia, with the ki's conse, who were to administ the roy levi at the sa ti as their o.

Nw by and by (the fifth gently crowed) thes appointmnts acquird a certan importanc, and som of thm wer bestowd to rewrd exceptionl servics as hereditar offics.

Whn (the sixth darkly confided) the mnes of the Slver Gln wre bandoned, the ffices cntinued, nd hve dne so dwn to the prsent—all of us are in trth dscendants of thse nble srvants whm the Arls of Mr nce hnored wth the pst of cstoms fficial.

O coure (the seventh screechily exclaimed) ou dutie hae no the importane the' ha i the ol day!

By the ay (the eighth characteristically asked) id ou ear the usic his orning? Hat is an od ustom, ideed an oligation, iposed on us oficers—we are upposed eery orning, on oening the ustoms-ouse, to ing the *Ymn to Ilver* omissioned from ome nomymous Eizabethan omposer to elebrate the ine.

Fr sm tm nw (the ninth mutteringly concluded) wv fnd it bttr—mr btfl as wll as plsntr fr us—to tk dvntg of the ltst tchnlgcl prgrss in prfrmng ths tsk.

Thanking all the officials for their helpfulness, I crossed the room to look over the books the Earls of Mar had thought necessary to suppress.

Among them were such varied titles as:

Samuel Pegge, the younger, *Curialia miscellanea; anecdotes of old times.*
Leonard Wright, *The hunting of Antichrist*
Wright's chaste wife, The
Daniel Featley, *The fisher catcht in his own net*
Edward Blount, *The hospital of incurable fools*
Thomas Pearson, *Infidelity; its aspects, causes, and agencies*
Thomas Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming*
Mary E. Braddon, *Only a clod*
Robert Baron, *The Cyprian academie*
Sir James M. Barrie, *When a man's single*
William Gouge, *The dignitie of chivalrie*

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George Peele, *The honor of the garter*
Susanna Centlivre, *A bold stroke for a wife*
Frank Barrett, *The sin of Olga Zassoulitch*
Richard Kearton, *Wild life at home*
John Stuart Blackie, *Lays of the highlands*
Henry Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua restaurata*
Nicholas Rowe, *The biter, a comedy*
John Hunter, *The natural history of the human teeth*
Thomas Hall, *Funebria florae; the downfall of May-games*
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The scarlet letter*
Robert Greene, *The historie of Orlando furioso*
Robert Records, *The urinal of physick*
Bert Morton, *The poet's office*
Mrs James W. Loudon, *Botany for ladies*
Thomas Bayly, *Herba parietis, or the wall-flower*
Henry Peacham, the younger, *Minerva Britanna, or a garden of heroical devises*
Henry Stubbe, *Rosemary and Bayes: or animadversions upon a treatise called The rehearsall trans-prosed*
John Florio, *Queen Anna's new world of words*
Ralph D. Wornum, *Analysis of ornament*
Hesba Stretton, *Through a needle's eye*
Bp Edward Reynolds, *The rich man's charge*
Jonathan Slick, *High life in New York*
Hamon L'Estrange, *Americans no Jewes*
Hamon L'Estrange, *The alliance of divine offices.*
Richard B. Kimball, *Undercurrents of Wall Street*
Samuel Rowlands, *The letting of humours blood in the head-vaine*
Fritdtjof Nansen, *The structure and combination of the historical elements of the central nervous system*
Gerard Leght, *The accedens of armory*
Robert Boyle, *The experimental history of colours*
James Wilson, *Biography of the blind*
Robert Tailor, *The hogge hath lost his pearle*
William Prynne, *A gagge for long-hair'd rattle-heads*
Whistle-Binkie

Nothing drew my particular notice until I came across a three volume novel by Berthold Auerbach, the nineteenth century regionalist; the title was quite unknown to me. Opening it at random, I came across a chapter whose heading was "The Otiose Creator" and my chance reading of it gave me the first clue to the solution of the enigmas that lay between me and Mr Wayl's heritage.

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"The Otiose Creator"

Gottfried told Maria his dream of the previous night.

"In a grey silence I floated upwards through the sky, past the clouds, past the stars. Then I came to another world and thought, 'This surely is Paradise.' At first I crossed meadows, then wooded hills with pretty streams. Beyond them was the city, extensive but surprisingly quiet.

"I walked down from the hills to enter the city, but I had not so much as reached the outskirts when I was stopped by a pitiful sight. A man lay in the ditch by the path I had taken. I have never seen anyone so thin: through his rags one could see, all over his body, the points of bones about to pierce the skin; and the skin, grey and transparent like greasy parchment, had indeed begun to break and flake off in many places. Little wheezing groans issued from his throat, wringing my heart in spite of horror and disgust. I ran towards the city to find someone to help me succor this poor creature. Barely arrived at the first buildings, I came upon a policeman whom I summoned to follow me. We were soon at the side of the helpless wretch. But when the latter saw who was with me, he loosed a shriek of horror, then became so still I thought he no longer breathed. As for the policeman, he had at first seemed indifferent to the prostrate man; but after the shriek he approached him, raised his club and struck him a terrible blow on the temple. Then the policeman saluted and started back towards the city. I sat there for a while in a shocked daze. After a while I looked at the stricken man, and I shuddered at the appearance of his head: the blow had truly bashed the skull in, making an indentation from eyebrow to crown of brownish blue. Yet as I looked the eyes opened, and the wheezing, groans started again, sharper than before. Then the eyes turned on me—or rather one of them turned, for the other had been immobilized in its socket by the blow—the eye turned on me, the groaning stopped, and the stricken man fell as silent as he had in front of the policeman. Incredulous, I turned towards the city.

"At the place where I had found the policeman another man now stood, as if waiting for me, and I soon recognised our nephew young Hans, who had died while at the university in Freiburg.

" 'Uncle Gottfried!' he cried when he had made me out. 'Welcome, welcome! I didn't know it was you, but I should have—always the model of civic duty. Confidentially, though, I think I should tell you—of course this is not to be taken as criticism,

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what you did was perfectly all right—I should tell you that outside the city they are allowed to do pretty much what they want. I see that you protest—it was in truth a fearful noise he made, but wasn't that after you had called the angel? You see, I watched the whole business, and it seemed to me that that fellow was behaving himself—considering the fact of course that he was outside the city. He wasn't really making very much noise and he was well concealed by the ditch. Naturally you did come upon him unexpectedly and it must have been a nasty shock—but you should see the ones farther out, especially up in the mountains: nauseating! And you should hear *them* scream. I had to go there only last month to gather some hair (it's amazing how hair grows on them no matter how abominable their condition), and I could swallow nothing but biscuits and milk for days. We should be grateful for the present policy, even if it is rather easy on them and deprives the rest of us of the consolation of witnessing their state.

" 'Then they are the damned?' I asked.

" 'What a funny thing to say, Uncle Gottfried!—although they must surely feel like the damned,' Hans answered with a laugh. 'No, it is better that they be left free in the country to lie in the open and lament than that they be kept in town and there stuffed in subcellars and publicly beaten. For no matter how thoroughly they are muffled and no matter how much pain is inflicted on them, it seems that the necessary municipal silence can never be attained: not only are they too miserable, they are simply too numerous. Imagine: 190,000,000,000 at the last census. Furthermore the space they occupied has been redeemed and converted into dormitories for the laborers that are really very cozy (cozy enough for them at any rate).—But tell me, Uncle: how long has it been since you arrived?'

" 'I was coming to the city for the first time when I found that man in the ditch.'

" 'Then you've just arrived? Good Lord, come over here, out of sight. Oh Uncle, why didn't you tell me? Thank goodness you've got your Sunday clothes on: ah, that's a stroke of luck—you could not imagine how sensitive they are to such things. Formerly, it seems, when the press of entrants was not so great, there was more tolerance as to such details; but nowadays one's respectability is established by one's shoes! Oh Uncle, I am happy for you—you can be certain they will listen to you, and you will have a chance to tell them about your farm and your livestock and your savings so carefully amassed (you may thank yourself for that trouble,

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Uncle!), and then you will be safe. Now you must not expect too much—you will have to work a little, probably in the aerial farms, but you will have all the farm-hands you want to help you; and with your savings you should be granted a satisfactory life. You will then be able to prepare the way for Aunt Maria—influence is always a help, although of course yours will be small. But that can wait: the thing to do now is to get you registered. I'm afraid it may take rather a long while, but at least you'll know once it's over that you are established *forever*! Believe me, that's a relief such as you've never experienced, and never will again.'

"Hans took me by the arm and led me towards the center of the city.

" 'Now let me remind you,' he said, 'to be careful in telling about your possessions. Don't mention everything (don't tell them how many hens you have, Uncle!)—just be sure not to leave out any major item. You see, while money isn't the only thing that counts—an influential protector can redeem individuals without a penny—it is frequently decisive in determining the category into which the new arrival is directed.'

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" 'But shouldn't I first point to other signs of worth?' I asked. 'The love I have borne my family, the care...'

" 'Yes, yes, Uncle, but they know of those things already. And then they really make so little difference. Such behavior is of course admired and welcomed, but it is very hard to evaluate. It is also so common—how few there are who cannot find excuses for their misbehavior! and in this respect kindness is the rule here—so common that it is useless as a basis for the complex classification our administrative angels have to make. Thus other elements are considered—among them wealth. (You understand that there is no money here, heaven forbid! One is supplied according to one's classification.) You may reasonably ask, isn't the good life of a poor man more meritorious than the same life lived by someone richer? But in this matter, the truth seems to be that the advantages of money not only should, but do, permit the rich to live superior moral lives. It appears that the poorer one is, the less time and energy one has for those beneficial actions that the comfortable are able to perform practically as a matter of course. So you see, taking money into consideration when establishing a person's dossier is anything but an injustice. It is really a question of giving people what they deserve, and this means what they are capable of, which in turn is decided by what they have been. Should a half-starved savage who has lived his life like an animal be given the same rewards as a man—for instance, an administrator or a poet—who has shown himself capable of service of a higher order? That would hardly be justice.'

"I walked on, clinging to Hans's arm in a state of bewilderment. We walked through many clean streets, and as we neared the center, the streets became grand avenues planted with sycamores, paved with tiles of many-colored moss.

" 'Hans, tell me: is the Good Lord here?'

"Indicating the splendid avenue before us he answered, 'How can you doubt it?'

" 'Does he know of such things as the man in the ditch?'

" 'Oh Uncle, heaven forbid! The poor Dear has already endured enough; and He has made all this possible for us. What ingratitude if we did not ensure Him peace at last! He has given *us* that, and more. He no longer must spend His hours on the care of His kingdom, but lives withdrawn in the most magnificent of palaces set in the fairest of parks, attended by those who best know His wants — His ministering angels are the highest classification of heaven. He lives in bliss, surrounded as He is only with praise and

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adoration; and His happiness is our sweetest joy (Uncle, forgive my tears). But look smart now! Here are the registration bureaux.'

"We had come to a grey building of many storeys, as vast as a fortress. There were two lines of people in front of it, one of those entering, the other of those leaving. As we approached, the latter was interrupted by a group that bustled down the great steps. Two uniformed men held a woman between them and hurried her along. The skin below her mouth was covered with a purple cancer. She disappeared with her guards down a nearby sidestreet that I had not noticed. Many such groups were proceeding down it.

" 'She is being taken out of the city,' Hans remarked.

" 'Like the man I found this morning?'

" 'Yes. Disease is not allowed in the city either, unless it is completely benign.'

" 'But surely the doctors here...'

" 'Oh, the doctors have all retired comfortably. It's their due, don't you think? Not quite all, as a matter of fact—there are a few so obsessed with disease that they have given up their greater privileges to live with the sick. They are thought to be a little crazy—can you imagine making such a choice for eternity?'

" 'Then that woman's disease will go on untreated?'

" 'Very likely.'

" 'But it will get no worse?'

" 'If its natural course is to get worse, it will.'

" 'But then sooner or later the disease will kill her.'

" 'No, no: no matter what happens, she will not die.'

"We had reached the top of the steps and were about to enter the building. All at once such a feeling of horror came over me that I cried out and, trembling, woke up. But once awake I realized, Maria, what had given me that feeling of horror. It was not horror at the vision before me, but at the thought that I too might be 'taken out of the city.' And the relief that followed was not only relief at waking but that of knowing that even *there* I had nothing to fear, and I thanked God in my heart for giving me the good things of this world.

"I remember that as I passed from sleep to waking I turned towards Hans, who smiled as he receded in my sight, and cried: 'Then it is only the same?' and he answered, 'The same, Uncle, but forever: world without end!'

"O Maria, hail to the Johnstones! the bloody Johnstones! the fucking Johnstones! the enemies of things as they are! They

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have come back to their own, they have come back to Alba as kings! May their Gypsy girl have wicked teeth in her cunt!"

The Customs House (II)

No sooner had I finished the chapter than a voice behind me said: I regret, sir—and turning I saw, next to the official who had first spoken to me, a small man dressed all in green (tweed, shirting, silk and suede)—that it will be impossible for me to give you the information you need.

Are you the director here? I asked. Perhaps then you might help me out with another problem, if you can spare me a few minutes.

I showed him the concluding paragraph of *The Otiose Creator*. Can you tell me who these Johnstones are?

Oh dear! However did you find *that?* Well: you see there is a family in this town called Johnstone (quite the *gratin*), but these are others—indeed the Earl no doubt suppressed Auerbach's book out of consideration for the proper Johnstones. The "Johnstones" Auerbach refers to are the family of a disowned bastard son of one of the Earls of Mar. This son came here around 1780 (from the colonies, I believe), making all kinds of trouble, taking the name of Johnstone, and pretending of all things to be not only of noble but of royal blood—I suppose that's why Auerbach says the Johnstones *sind als Königen nach Alba heimgekehrt*. He even adopted a coat of arms—a stupid pretention when everyone knew he had no claim to any title whatsoever.

Could you describe the coat of arms?

No, but I'll look it up for you if you like. (I'm awfully sorry I can't help you out about that adze.) It's surely listed in Cremlin-Bicetre; let's see—Jargon, Jessel, Jinemevicz, Job: here we are, *Johnstone:*

Gold a bend silver with halberd gules

and the reason above:

L'herminette à la taille du roy!

There!

A loonlike factory whistle resounded from the foggy air outside while I studied the heraldic register.

After a long moment the green director began looking at me with diffidence; so I thanked him and—once he had sternly told

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me that the customs house contained no other documents on the "Johnstones"—went out.

The director accompanied me to the door.

You were fortunate, he said, to have heard our madrigal this morning—strange to say, our apparatus works in indirect proportion to the fineness of the weather: it needs a truly foul day to hear the music fair.

[*To me that day was anything but foul:* l'herminette à la taille du roy—*kingfitted ermine, or a kingsized adze; the halberd in the coat of arms was the image of my "adze"; and the colors of the shield, red on gold, were the same at the adze's appearance during Mr Wayl's race.*

Convinced that I could find in Alva final proof that the original "Johnstone" was the stone-not-king of the first riddle, I visited the town hall to examine its records. A clerk allowed me to enter after telling me the story of a later "Johnstone"—the physicist Innocent, whose life had been lost as a result of his experiments with fleshmetal, a substance of incomprehensibly corrosive power once found in the marshwaters of the Silver Glen.

In the papers of the municipal library, I soon discovered the papers of the first false Johnstone, and among them a curious letter by him. Preceding its text were four lists of rejections that showed he had submitted the letter to newspapers over the world throughout the last half of the 18th century.

The letter concerned the Silver Glen of Alva, whose original name was, according to the writer, Sylvius's Glen: it was there that a sect—known as Sylvians from their worship of Sylvius, king of Rome—had settled in the 15th century on land granted them by one of their followers, Alexander Stewart, the Earl of Mar. A later Earl of Mar had, however, destroyed the Sylvian community and ravaged the Glen with royal consent and with the help of "Gypsies and Beggars"; and his successors had created the semblance of a silver mine as a pretext for keeping out intruders, notably the Sylvians. Nevertheless the Sylvians had not relinquished their claim to the Glen—Johnstone's letter was a reassertion of it. Although reduced in number, their hierarchy was intact, and their kings had succeeded each other in unbroken line, each a noble bastard as Alexander Stewart had been. Occasional men of genius—such as "Rolando Lasso, Prince of musicians"—had publicly recognized their right. The letter closed with a plea for help.

At the bottom of the last page a note from a certain La Platière had been attached. Dated 10 Brumaire An II at Rouen, it was apparently an answer to Johnstone's letter: "Monsieur, peut-être êtes-vous un bâtard, vous êtes sûrement un imposteur, car notre dernier roi est mort bien avant Louis de France. Je veille pour notre Reine, que son règne soit éternel!"

The letter proved my solution of the first riddle. I decided, in order to solve the other two, to find out first who La Platière was, and left Alva intending to go to Rouen on his trace. I was troubled by his mention of "our Queen," a phrase the Gypsy on the beach had used in explaining a scene on the adze.

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Was she the same as Auerbach's "Gypsy girl"? (But "Gypsies and Beggars" had plundered the Silver Glen.) Was Mr Wayl's saint no saint?

(Before leaving Alva, I tried to visit the Silver Glen but met a rural policeman on the way who prevented my entering. He told me that aside from a waterfall the place was uninteresting, filled with stunted trees and covered with a variety of clematis known as "traveller's joy"—an inappropriate name in my case.)

Rereading the letter, the name of Rolando Lasso caught my attention; I stopped in Edinburgh to see if the Messe de Sire Fadevant *might not have some connection with the composer. The current issue of a musicological review announced a forthcoming article by Professor Bumbè of Sienna: "Una Missa Fa Si Re, Opera Sconosciuta di Orlando di Lasso." Delighted at the rightness of my hunch, I regretted not having grasped the riddle within the riddle: that "Sire Fadevant" meant "fa devant si re" and not the Lord Fadevant I had vainly pursued.*

It was at this time that I learned of the Fods' decision to contest Mr Wayl's will; so I changed my plans and travelled to Sienna in the hopes of conclusive information.

There Professor Bumbè received me at the Palazzo Grembo-Maledetti, and spoke to me at length of Lasso's mass. Knowledge of it came from two extant letters. The first was to Lasso from his publisher Le Roy: it questions him about the mass, composed on a "motto" of three notes, whose names provided its title—a common practise at the time, made singular in this case by the opening interval fa-si *(a tritone or* diabolus in musica*) and by Lasso's declaration that the note-names stood for secret Latin words. Le Roy lists a number of guesses as to these words and requests elucidation. The second letter, from Lasso to Le Roy, answers the first: three of Le Roy's solutions*—Facio sigla Regis, Faber Sibylla Regorum, Faex signat Reginam—*are not wrong, but they are not the ones intended; a* chanson *by Lasso on the same motto is mentioned; but no further explanation is given.*

The Professor was only able to learn more about the mass through luck. Remembering an odd Jacobean poem seen in manuscript years before, he obtained a copy of it and was gratified that it was evidently an acrostic transposition into English of the text of Lasso's chanson: *the initial letters of the verses, inscribed in red, yielded three* fa si re *sentences:*

Fateor Silvium regem *I acknowledge Silvius as king*
Fata Silvium retexunt *The Fates undo Silvius (*or *The Fates weave Silvius anew)*
Favonius sinistrâ revolvit *The west wind returns on the left*

Although I suggested that sinistrâ *might signify bastardy, Professor Bumbè seemed uninterested in exploring the subject further; and our interview ended on a note of sour indifference.*]

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Felix Namque

Midnight struck while I was returning to my hotel. As I followed the dark and sinuous slope of the Via Grover-Whalen, I reflected on the recent interview.

Lasso's cryptic sentences were plain. The unravelling and reweaving of Sylvius—surely Silvius was he, and surely the double meaning of *Fata Silvium retexunt* was intentional—signified an unbroken royal succession. Favonius returning meant that as the west wind of spring renewed the life of the fields, each bastard king brought prosperity with him. That the *diabolus in musica* was the signal of Lasso's message implied that this was, as the later Earls of Mar had evidently claimed, heretical; and the coded transmission of the message pointed to a widespread conspiracy of the sect. Once again the queen had appeared, mysteriously as ever in Lasso's third hint, more tangibly in the fervent text of the poem. What was the truth of the adze's engraved story?

I had a sure answer to the second question of the will, and a probable answer to the first. I had to confirm the latter, and pursue my investigations in the hope that I might come across a clue to the nature of the "old man's beard."

The next day I set out for France, reaching Rouen in forty-eight hours. It was easy enough to identify La Platière, who to my surprise turned out to be the celebrated Girondist, Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière; but the records of the statesman, like those of Lasso, showed no sign of a connection with the Sylvians. I pursued my inquiries in the archives of every town where Roland had lived: Nantes, Thizy-Ouzoult, Lyon, Amiens, and finally Paris. In none did I find a useful fact, and at last, every public record examined, I sought out Roland's descendants. There was only one of them left in France, but I discovered him easily, for he was a celebrity in his own right and a man whom I should have been curious to meet in ordinary circumstances.

He was M. Félix Namque, a painter settled in Paris, whose fame had grown so rapidly during the preceding decade that he was established at the age of thirty-five as a leader of postwar art. His merited vogue had followed the notoriety given his unique style of coloring. In each of his pictures the colors were never equivalent to those of their subject —they were always highly "interpreted." Yet they did not seem to be the mere result of fancy, taste or any personal predilection; they rather gave the impression of following some systematic distortion. Critics and amateurs had exchanged

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numberless fatuities trying to reveal the principle governing M. Namque's methods, but none of their suppositions and analyses, no matter how ingenious or thorough, could completely account for the coloring of even a single picture; and explaining the ensemble of the artist's work seemed a goal quite out of sight.

I had written to M. Namque frankly describing my plight. His quick answer invited me in the kindest terms to call on him at his studio, located on the top floor of the foamrubber building of the rue Ostende, in Passy. At the time of my visits he was engaged in finishing the portrait of Pierre Martory, the young Basque torero who was the latest star of the bullfighting world. Martory was known in Spain as El Porrón because of his winedark complexion (a birthmark covered his whole head) and because his nose stuck up in a long thin cone, like the spout of a Spanish wineflask. I had heard that El Porrón was an example of skill, courage and dignity such as had never been seen in the bullring. He worked so close to the bull that several of his admirers of both sexes had received from the acuteness of their empathy various stigmata-like wounds—rents of pathetic reality in their thighs, abdomens and chests, according to the passage of the horn. El Porrón himself had never been seriously hurt, and he was suspected by the credulous of hiring witches to transfer his gorings to his more sensitive fans. It was practically miraculous that he was still alive. M. Namque was painting the bullfighter dressed for the ring, wearing in his pigtail a splinter taken from the central vertebra of the five-year-old bull Leñizgo. His killing of this animal had won him its ears, tail, four hooves, head, and—as a final and insuperable trophy—its backbone. It was during the faena with Leñizgo that El Porrón, disdaining the adjurations of manager and public to take no chances with that wily and cruel beast, first executed his *paso de la estrellas*, in which the bull passes directly over the fighter's prone body.

During the sittings I observed, M. Namque painted most of the time in a normal manner. Occasionally, however, he would disappear for a moment behind a broad curtain of grey velvet from which, through an elastic slit worked halfway between its center and right edge, a lense-tipped tube stuck out. A faint humming from behind the curtain accompanied these brief withdrawals.

For reasons of temperament, M. Namque and I were drawn to each other from our first meeting. We dined together several times and rapidly came to treat each other as friends. My conversations with him provided a happy outlet for the anxiety that had

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soured the recent months of my life; and it was no doubt to divert me from my preoccupations that Félix one day delighted me by proposing to reveal his secret and controversial techniques. That evening, after El Porrón had left, he took me behind the velvet curtain.

Half of the concealed space, perhaps thirty square feet in all, contained a large machine that suggested a specialist's device for sounding some invisible organ. Its case of grey enamelled metal was, on the side facing us (opposite the one by the curtain) fitted with a pane of clear glass that exposed the mechanism within. Above the pane, two bands of eleven silver switches were fitted to the lateral rim of the case. Twin viewers, somewhat penny-arcadian, rose from the upper surface of the machine, one at the center, the other towards the right-hand edge, while at an equivalent distance to the left a tubular knee, similarly attached, extended its horizontal shaft through the curtain slit. (It was the other end of this tube, fitted with a lense, that I had observed in the studio.) The machine had no other external features except, at each end, for a thick cord of rubber-covered wire that crossed the floor to a base-plug.

Behind the pane of glass lay an apparently simple apparatus. Its chief component was an arrangement of metal tubing, of a thickness of several inches, that had the shape of a trident. The left-hand prong of tube was attached to the lense-tipped knee; the other two were attached to the viewers. The outermost prongs and the base of the trident comprised one unbroken piece of tubing, while the central prong, a separate length, was hermetically joined to the first.

The two outer shafts of tubing were each fitted with eleven metallic cups that occupied the spaces between the tube-system and the ends of the case. The cups were all wired, every wire being connected first to one of the twenty-two switches of the two panels and ultimately to the external cords.

Félix explained how the machine functioned. The image received by the lense in the studio was transmitted throughout the trident-shaped tubes by a series of mirrors fixed within them. The transmitted image underwent two alterations. As it passed down the lefthand shaft, appropriate bulbs in the metal cups, which opened on the shaft's interior, subjected the image to a battery of adverse colored lights that acted as an optical sieve, straining all natural color out. The image at this stage was observable in the viewer surmounting the central shaft of tubing; the primary

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functions of this viewer was to determine by observation exactly which lights (controlled by the leftmost panel of switches) were needed to reduce the colored image to greyness.

The straining lamps were termed by Félix *rejectors*.

Thus neutralized, the image entered the right-hand shaft of tube. Again it was subjected to a series of colored lights, but, in distinction to the first set, these infused new colors into the image. The recolored image appeared in the viewer on the right, while the switches below it controlled the second group of lights.

The color-infusing lamps were called *projectors*.

The machine itself, of Félix's own invention, had been baptised *chromaturge*. Félix was understandably pleased with it; its final images were the inexhaustible source of his notorious color-schemes.

In order to produce a freshly colored image, the chromaturge required one decision of its operator—the choice of projectors. At the very start Félix had had to decide before the machine was built what his gamut of colored lights was to be. He had preferred to make this selection once and for all; so rather than use colored bulbs which could, when replaced, tempt him to modify his palette, he had had immovable colored panes, with white bulbs behind them, fixed along the shaft's inner surface. The panes represented a familiar pattern. The numbered switches controlled the following hues:

1. White (= light)
2. Black (= dark)
3. Yellow
4. Red
5. Pink
6. Chocolate
7. Gold
8. Fire-red
9. Violet
10. Blue
11. Purple

The next question was how to pick from this sequence of colors the ones to be used in a particular instance. Félix was again averse to letting chance or taste decide. He considered many systematic approaches, based on the size, shape, age, sex and chemistry of the subject to be painted. In the end he discarded them all as unsatisfactory. The painting, he decided, had its own independant existence; therefore the painting, not the subject, would determine the colors. Félix considered three facts to be of fundamental relevance to the painting's existence: the date and hour of the painting's "birth," the phase of the moon at the time of the painting's "conception," and its price. He used the figures representing these facts as his color-scheme. The only

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option he permitted himself was the number of colors employed. The exploitation of all three facts usually brought all eleven colors into play, albeit in descending order of importance, while the use of one or two elements, or even a part of the first one (the date without the hour) allowed of a simpler color-scheme.

Félix illustrated his procedure with the case of El Porrón.

The bullfighter's first sitting had been on the 10 brumaire An CXLVIII. (Félix used the revolutionary calendar in honor of his ancestor.) This date, figured as 10/2/148, yielded the colors 10 (blue), 2 (black), 1 (white), 4 (red), and 8 (fire-red). These then were the dominant tones of the portrait. The torero's face and hands were a gorgeous blue, while his costume was a brilliant orange-red that, thanks to the chiaroscuro treatment effected by tones 1 and 2, stood strikingly free of a dull red background.

The sitting had begun at 10:07 in the morning. This number involved only the seventh switch, the tenth being already in use. Gold had glowingly touched El Porrón's nails, eyes and teeth—the latter providing that "anchor in the real" that critics hailed in all of Félix's otherwise baffling works.

The "conception" of the portrait—a phonecall offering the commission—had occurred a few weeks prior to the first sitting, under the third phase of the moon; the third switch had given the bullfighter flaxen hair and lemony stockings.

Finally, the price agreed on—1,196,500 francs—had introduced certain finishing details: purple buttons, violet spangles, the chocolate bone splinter, and three pink rings.

Félix had mentioned the price sulkily—it was about half what he usually asked. Questioned on this point, he bitterly remarked that it was not the first time he had made such a sacrifice for the sake of art. Further questioning extracted the confession that he had created near scandals by insisting on prices that were "inevitably high"; that he had postponed the start of one portrait for weeks, almost losing an important client thereby, until a certain "appropriate day"; and that once he had left a hospital bed with pneumonia and a fever of 104° to begin a still-life of imperishable objects "before it was too late."

These admitted subterfuges confirmed my growing suspicion that Félix used his system to achieve and justify what he felt like doing. The one uncontrollable number, and then only in such cases as El Porrón's, was that of the work's "conception." But when I suggested that he might have waited to start his portrait until the convenient moment of 10:07 because he wanted to give

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the torero golden eyes, he was indignant. I listened to his harangue on the impersonality and rigor of his system, then changed the subject.

Yet I was not convinced, and my belief that Félix's system was only a means of supplying him with material for the exercise of his talent was unexpectedly confirmed when he let me look through the two viewers of his machine: the images of his studio that I beheld were exactly alike, and what is more, they were unaltered replicas of what appeared, through the spread curtain, to my naked eye.

As for Roland de la Platière, Félix could not himself help me. But he told me of a document that, as he remembered, might well touch on the matter. It was a letter that Roland had written shortly before his death to a French lady; her heirs, long afterwards, had returned it to Roland's family. Félix had last heard of it when it was taken to the United States by his cousin, Roland's only other living descendant. Félix gave me his name and address, and a letter of introduction.

I was pleased with this development, for I had good reason already to return to America. My appearance in probate court with such evidence as I had would certainly strengthen my claim to Mr Wayl's fortune; and in addition I wished once more to see my wife, who had recently begun proceedings against me for divorce. So, in early December, after a farewell celebration at the Café Chien, Félix drove me to Le Havre to board my ship home.

An Ex-Book

My other affairs settled, I soon left New York for Florida where, at Hialeah, I easily found Félix's cousin, Bunuel Namque-Schlendrian. This tiny, much travelled man, fifteen years older than Félix, was as kind to me as his younger relative. After reading through my letter of introduction, he embraced me as if I were a long-lost friend.

At Namque-Schlendrian's insistence, I spent several days as his guest. I believe his hospitality was engendered by the extraordinary turn his fortunes had just taken; for if his pretext for having me stay was a desire for news of Félix, whom he had not seen in twenty-five years, his true motive was certainly a natural eagerness to share new happiness with a new acquaintance. It was not long before I became as intimate with him as I had with his

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cousin; and so I learned the story of Bun's life, which had culminated in success on the very eve of my arrival.

As his name indicated, Namque-Schlendrian was descended through his mother from General Schlendrian, the officer who in the late stages of the Franco-Prussian War had organized an exceptionally effective corps from the troops recruited during his service in Algeria. Among all the "fog of war" no unit harassed the invaders so brilliantly; the reason for their effectiveness, expert training and tactical flair aside, lay in the devotion the Arab troops bore their chief. When Schlendrian's Fellahs were disbanded after the armistice, they further proved this devotion by a communal gift to the general of twenty million Red Sea cowries. (These shells, whose scientific name is *Cypraea turdus*, were once highly valued by many North African tribes.)

The Schlendrian family was then rich. Foolish speculation, bad luck and the dissipations of several members reduced the estate, by the time Namque-Schlendrian was born, to a poor fraction of its former size. His parents died while he was in school, leaving him on his own at the age of seventeen with only a modest inheritance to his advantage. (His only relative was Félix, poor himself.) This inheritance amounted to a small country place in the Beauce; an apartment in Paris; a few books; furniture; and the twenty million cowries.

Restless, solitary and young, Namque-Schlendrian considered what he might make of his life with necessary coolness and rare open-mindedness. Certain ethnoconchological studies persuaded him that he could do better than work respectably at a dull and illpaid office job. Selling his country house and its furnishings for ready cash, he set out with fifty cases of cowries on his long travels.

A steamer took him to Melbourne, whence he proceeded north to Brisbane, there hiring a small boat that brought him around the northeastern Australian coast to Arnheim Land. With a guide and several porters, he travelled inland until, after two weeks, he came to his first goal, the encampment of the Aulayulia tribe. These aborigines used shell money for their trading; their common currency was the cowrie—not the *Cypraea turdus*, but the Indian cowrie, *Cypraea caput serpentis*. They were nevertheless familiar with the *Cypraea turdus*. It seems that at some moment in their past they had traded with a people who bartered the rarer Red Sea shell and had come into possession of a small quantity of it. This store had through loss and theft been so diminished through the countless years that the foreign cowries, held precious from the

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moment of their acquisition, had assumed a practically sacred value. Namque-Schlendrian hoped to profit from this.

He negotiated for three months with the Aulayulia chieftains. The notion that there could exist so many "rare" shells at first appalled them into a hesitant confusion; but Namque-Schlendrian's patience allowed their reverence for the cowries to reassert its sway, and he finally exchanged his shells for two hundred and fifty million Indian cowries.

Namque-Schlendrian returned to Melbourne to embark with his six hundred and twenty-five cases for Zanzibar. Thence he trekked to the country north of Unyamwezi where he traded his Indian cowries for six hundred and fifty million money cowries (*Cypraea moneta*). He and his one thousand six hundred and twenty-five cases then journeyed by sea around the Cape of Good Hope and up the West African coast, disembarking at Buea in the Cameroons. Travelling inland once more, in a northeasterly direction, he shortly reached the banks of the river Yo. With the negroes of the region he made a final exchange (transport costs rendered further exploitation of shell values unprofitable). The value assigned to the money cowrie in Western Africa was five times that of the east coast: the Yo natives estimated Bun's shells as worth twenty-eight pounds thirteen ounces of gold, which they paid; Namque-Schlendrian ended his first wanderings, just as his supply of cash ran out, with the rewarding sum of fourteen thousand dollars.

This money, while worth treble its present value, was far from enough to live on; but it provided Namque-Schlendrian with what he needed most—a small capital to invest when an exceptional opportunity appeared. Now Namque-Schlendrian had already noted such an opportunity, and he decided to take advantage of it immediately.

Namque-Schlendrian admitted that in this matter his good sense had, after a while, given way to an almost monomaniac obstinacy. He could have abandoned his scheme once he recognized the obstacles to realizing it. Instead, he endured for its sake ill health, poverty and humiliation.

During his sojourn in Australia, Namque-Schlendrian, who was versed in the history of horseracing, had learned that Cartesian Diver and Fink's Folly, both descendants of Pettifog from Lala (although through different lines), had arrived in Sydney to be set to stud. Pettifog had, in his offspring from Lala, transmitted a curious set of minor deformations that first appeared in his ancestor

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Gypsum. Namque-Schlendrian had been convinced by a study of the records of these horses that they would become fine runners if properly handled.

A brief genealogy of the animals involved is in order. Spurius, the son of Pettifog from Lala by Breastbone from Armchair by Gladstone from Rippe-van-Winkle by Whig from Nutcracker Suite by Gypsum from White Loss, sired Cartesian Diver from Latest Sin, who, shipped to Australia, there sired Melancthon from Greta Garbo, Spelling Bee from Periphrasis, Black Dick from Penal Servitude, and Ticktock from Asylum. Pettifog also sired from Lala several mares. The most successful of these was Cunning, who threw Brickbat to Fug, who sired the Derby winner Krach from Liliom, and Zazz to Horse, who threw in turn the handicap champion Hangover to Lordy Me. Another mare was named Fink's Folly; she was sent to Australia with Cartesian Diver, and there threw Flibbetigibbet, Pounce, and Excitation to Jinglebells, all of which raced poorly. Among the mares she foaled were Crass Delight, June Filly, Poontang, Gatta-malatta, and, lastly, Grave Lady. The latter's sire, Lugstone, who had been set to Maryjohn, was by Celtic Doom from Alba Longa by Fissure from Would-to-God by Bloody Bastard from Pity Palace. In Australia, before being bought by Namque-Schlendrian she threw Schwarzwald to Plexus; under Bun's ownership she threw six colts to Ticktock—Triple X, Frosty Mikado,

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Buckwheat Blues, Watchstopper's Gusset, Bulldog Lemny, and Winged Cribbage; and two fillies—Wilder Membership and Commie Coup.

Originally Namque-Schlendrian planned to buy Cartesian Diver and Fink's Folly. In order to learn the trade, he returned to Australia and went to work at the farm where the two horses were at stud, first as hotwalker, later as groom and exercise boy. A series of disasters wrecked his plans. At the end of his second year, he was thrown by a horse, fracturing his skull in the fall. Namque-Schlendrian spent eight months in a coma and two years recovering. Resuming his duties, he performed them satisfactorily for another year and was ready to turn owner when, overcome by one of the spells of giddiness that followed his accident, he so mismanaged his mount that the horse broke a leg under him and had to be shot. Since this animal was a prize three-year-old, Namque-Schlendrian was obliged to compensate its owner with a large sum; and when he tried to make up his loss with a few heavy bets at the track, bad luck reduced what was left of his stake to less than three thousand dollars. Still undismayed, he went on at his job hoping, since he earned a good wage, to save enough for his purpose. His savings had by 1940 grown to the equivalent of eleven thousand dollars. In the spring of that year they were seized with the bank accounts of all French residents upon the formation of the Pétain government. At first interned, Namque-Schlendrian later served honorably in the war as a liaison officer for the Far Eastern Gaullist platoon. His services failed to recover his money, or at least not its true value. It was transferred to France at the prewar rate of exchange, under an agreement between the Free French and Australian governments, and its buying power had fallen, by the time Namque-Schlendrian could use it, to about fifteen hundred dollars. Even this could not be taken out of France.

The following three years were the saddest of Namque-Schlendrian's life. He went back to work at the stable, but despondently, not knowing what else to do. No longer an inspiration, his obsession had become a dead weight he dragged hopelessly about. Cartesian Diver and Fink's Folly were now both dead. In their place his choice had fallen on their foals Ticktock and Grave Lady. When these horses were sold and sent to the United States, Namque-Schlendrian managed to accompany them as groom. In less than a year he had lost this job because of his growing carelessness, the result of recurring depressions. He then joined a small organi-

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zation of bookmakers in which, thanks to his native acumen, he was able to make a modest living until his luck turned.

His good fortune came from an unexpected quarter. In the fall of 1950, Félix wrote him a letter telling him of the current demand for apartments in Paris and advising him to let his, long vacant. Authorized to act on his cousin's behalf, Félix made a few minimal repairs and soon had a tenant. The apartment was attractively situated: a comfortable soundproofed studio in the tower of the church of St Germain-des-Près. Namque-Schlendrian began receiving monthly cheques of five hundred, a thousand, and, finally, two thousand dollars. In less than three years he was the owner of a well staffed stud farm in Fayette County, Kentucky, where Grave Lady had already thrown Ticktock his first colt, Triple X.

Only the day before I arrived in Hialeah Triple X had made and won his initial start, running three furlongs in 0:32$^{2}/_{5}$, finishing eleven lengths in front of the second horse, and confirming his owner's twenty-five-year-old hunch.

Gypsum and certain of his offspring, notably the descendants of Pettifog and Lala, were known for certain external peculiarities—slightly curby hocks, lop ears and high withers. Namque-Schlendrian believed, at first after a long study of their past performances, later from observation, that these visible characteristics were accompanied by a certain organic deformation. As owner of Ticktock and Grave Lady he found his hypothesis exact. In both these horses and, subsequently, in their foals, the splanchnic nerve, which controls the adrenal gland, passed in abnormal fashion through the coil of the large intestine on its way from medulla to kidney. Namque-Schlendrian reasoned that the nerve was stimulated, and the production of adrenaline increased, when the horse's intestines were exceptionally swollen—that is, when the horse was constipated; and he believed this fact might provide the realization of the racing bug's dream—the undetectable fix.

A less talented man might have failed to use such knowledge properly. With patience, imagination and pluck, Namque-Schlendrian succeeded in the formidable task of training a horse to constipate himself voluntarily at set times. At his farm he determined the delicate intervals (varying with every horse) between feeding, the onset of constipation and the running of the race. He had seen his methods justified in his private time trials: when properly costive, Triple X, his very soul soaked in adrenaline, surpassed his best "free" performances. The colt's first race had of

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course been the supreme test, and Triple X's victory a supreme consolation for Namque-Schlendrian's years of ignominy. The suspicions of the judges, amazed at the colt's performance, were allayed by the official analyses, which showed that no drug had been administered nor illegal physical stimulus applied. The bookmakers who had been his partners were also surprised—Namque-Schlendrian collected from them the fruits of two thousand dollars invested at twenty-two to one. (Even the odds had been favored by his machinations: in the paddock, the beginnings of the adrenaline-attack had put Triple X in such a sweat that he scared away many of his potential backers).

Such was Namque-Schlendrian's history as he told it to me. He gave me an additional mark of confidence after he had finished his tale by revealing yet another trade secret. This was a stopwatch that he had had made to fit under the instep of his foot; it was operated by moving the great toe. The hidden contraption gave Namque-Schlendrian easy access to the jealously guarded time-trials of his competitors. The results of these trials were precious information, and no responsible owner or trainer invited anyone to them out of politeness or friendship. Namque-Schlendrian's charm had won him a privileged place in the society of owners. By making a point of never carrying or using a stopwatch, or even an ordinary watch, he persuaded his colleagues that there was no danger in his witnessing their tryouts, rather an opportunity to show off their horses to an appreciative connoisseur.

Namque-Schlendrian had given Jean-Marie Roland's letter to the Canossa Washington Library of Fitchwinder University in Swetham, Massachussetts. Since only specialists were allowed to consult the manuscript collection of which the letter was now a part, Namque-Schlendrian wrote on my behalf to the library director, thus advancing my investigations greatly.

During my last afternoon in Hialeah, I payed a farewell call on Namque-Schlendrian in his office suite at the track. He showed me his collections of souvenirs and curiosities, among them a medieval muleteer's packsaddle that had been given to him by none other than Mr Wayl. I recognised on it a familiar design. Worked long ago into the cracked leather, it was still legible: a naked woman stood near the mouth of a stream by a mound of cowrie shells. The scene was identical with the one engraved on the point of my adze, except that on the saddle the woman was depicted from behind. Mr Wayl had led me to believe that this scene was merely decorative; yet here it was underscored with the

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inscription, *Cypriae Sedes Gloria Regis*, while the other side of the saddle bore the arms of the "false Johnstones," with an added mark—a band that crossed the shield from the upper right corner to the center and then descended to its point.

After quitting Bun (he knew nothing at all about the saddle: Mr Wayl had given it to him because of his knowledge of cowries) I proceeded to Boston and to nearby Swetham, where I spent a day in the study of Roland's letter. Mr Meniscus, the library director, has forbidden me to reproduce its text, but he has most kindly authorized the translation that follows.

Roland to Madame Miot (I)

chez Mlle Malortie,
dans la rue de l'Ours,
Rouen.

Le 9 Brumaire, An II.

Madam,

I write in a state of dejection such as I have not known in many years. So much time has passed since your letter came—and such time! It has exhausted my life, and me; I have passed through multiples of anguish; I have yearned for peace, then resignation, and afterwards hopelessness, but it seems there is no passivity in despair—the insomniac quest for death is an ascent into pain. I live now—well, I am simply alive. I try to order what is still mine, although there is no distraction in it; and so I shall answer your queries. I am thankful that my matter will give me words to send you; my brain is in truth quite blank otherwise, except for what is unspeakable.

I have indeed "visited Egypt," like my old namesake, perhaps learning there more than even he; and I did not have to cross water to reach it. I think you know the manner of my acquaintance with those people, and the depth of my attachment. As for the history, I can offer fragments only—the records are few, many have been lost or destroyed. There have, however, been certain letters, whose details—with due prudence—can be enriched with familiar lore; and the facts admitted into official texts—*quegli scritti lugubri che fanno tornare eternamente i morti!*—must in turn be introduced, and then we have—not a history, but bright glimpses

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of a history: like a winter moon in the chance openings of snow-clouds.

In the year 1410 a clan of Wallachian Gypsies came to Scotland from the continent. They preceded the mass of their race by nearly a century; for among their own people they were renegades. Small, dark, quickfooted, they ressembled their fellow Gypsies in physique, and like them, they raised horses and cattle. It was their religion that marked them. They had preserved the practise of an old cult dedicated to Sylvius of Alba Longa, and they worshipped him as a divine hero, and as their king. In their version of the legend, Sylvius was no son of Aeneas but a bastard offspring of Lavinia, fathered by a god whose name could never be mentioned or written down. There is nothing I can tell you of the origins and growth of the sect in antiquity, or of its history during the first thirteen centuries of Christianity: the tale must be discovered by a more enlightened age that will recognize wisdom in the diligence of the learned. My knowledge begins with their establishment in Scotland, and the first celebrations of their mysteries, in a shrine that lay not far from the town of Allova (*sic*), in the year 1411.

The new shrine received Sylvius's name—a name belonging not only to the legendary hero, but given as a title to the successive chiefs of the Gypsies, whom they called kings. They believed that Sylvius was immortal in the bodies of these kings, and that he sanctified them by his presence. In 1411 Alexander Stewart, a recent convert to the sect, and its protector, bore the name. Like every king he was born in bastardy of noble stock; and he had been *chosen*.

For Sylvius, god or man, was not the supreme ruler: that authority belonged to the "Queen" whose viceregent he was. She is an obscure power. Unlike the king's, her office was not perpetually renewed—she was supposedly a divine being who from time to time, when the need arose, appeared among her worshippers as a mere woman. I cannot say how often she manifested herself, or how she was recognized. Only one of her peculiarities is known: she was nearly always gifted with some negro blood.

All the shrines of the sect were established for the performance of her rites. Concerning one of these, the Flaying of the King, I know more than little. It was performed in the glen near Allova, on Hallowe'en and All Hallows Day, a year after the Gypsies' arrival.

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The gathering of the sect took place during the morning of the first day. Most of those that came were Gypsies, but there were many Scots and English lately converted, and an even greater number of earlier converts from the countries of Europe. The first business was the publication and discussion of the year's accounts. During the afternoon there were numerous private ceremonies of marriage, burial and initiation.

The marriage ceremony culminated in the eating by the bride and the groom of a small cake made out of malt, rye and lard together with bits of hair clipped from the sacred parts of their bodies—loins, armpit, and head.

The blessing of the dead consisted in clothing the corpses (preserved through the year for this occasion) with fresh ash leaves, then sprinkling them with a powder of dried bdellium gum.

Children brought for initiation were similarly sprinkled. I do not know the practice relating to adult initiates.

Towards evening, the king, dressed in mean clothes, approached the sacred ashtree. He was there stripped by seven seven-year-old boys, and bitten by seven seven-year-old dogs. He stood before the Queen, who was accompanied by a young woman carrying a bowl of liquid bdellium gum, and by a young man who in one hand held a gisarme, which they called an adze (*une hallebarde que l'on appelait herminette*), in the other a wooden effigy of the king. The effigy, about three feet high, had been grotesquely carved from a piece of white poplar and afterwards smoked black; a metal point was attached to its base. The adze was made of gold, fitted with an iron edge.

The young man, planting the effigy in the ground, began lopping off its projecting members one by one with the adze. As each part fell, the Queen smeared the same part of the king with gum, until the effigy had been reduced to a straight white bolt and the king had been anointed all over his body. A second young man approached, carrying a crossbow. He drew the wooden shaft from the earth, set it in his bow, and shot it into the trunk of the ashtree. As soon as a leaf fell from the tree, all withdrew but the king, who was left alone, naked and erect under the tree, its leaves falling on him through the night. His followers did not sleep but wandered at a distance through the woods surrounding the glen. Those newly married on beds of leaves consummated or confirmed their marriage. The blessed corpses were deposed in holy streams and caves.

(What did the Queen do during that night? According to some,

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she returned to the king to sleep with him. Others say she murdered and replaced him, out of sight of all.)

The ashtree shed all its leaves in that one night, many of them falling on the king and adhering to his gummy limbs. In the morning the entire sect, gathered anew, finds the tree bare and their king glued with ashleaves. The Queen comes to him and leads him to a nearby spring, where she washes him and herself (she is naked) a first time. Once more she rubs the king with gum, mixed with seven hundred appleseeds. Then she daubs herself completely with mud from the ground near the spring, to which the young woman again attending her adds petals of bloody-fingers (*doigts de la Vierge*). The king and Queen return to the ashtree's foot, where their followers await them in neat ranks. The young woman now opens many boxes containing tiny grey butterflies, gathered during the summer months and carefully saved; while the young man, the destroyer of the king's effigy, looses a large flock of bullfinches from a cage in the ashtree's lower branches. The butterflies alight by the hundred on the muddy Queen, covering her in so close a robe she seems a statue of pale grey fur. The bullfinches attack the king to peck off his coat of seeds. Their hard bills pierce him in many places, and the king bleeds: all the believers come forward in an orderly file to kiss his blood. They cannot touch the Queen, kissing instead the ground before her. (But since her eyes are covered, she does not see this homage.) After a while the butterflies, unfit for November air, fall off dying. The Queen leads the bloody king back to the spring, washes him, and clothes him in his royal suit of leather leaves. She has first cleansed herself, and put on a black goat surplice lined entirely with white catskins. On the lining's border a motto has been sewn with thread wound out of rhubarb fibers. The motto reads: *Aeneas Nothus Rex: Rex Nothus Sylvius.* Beneath her surplice the Queen is naked, save for her garter of puffballs, and goes barefoot. The worshippers this morning all wear hats, and many sport on their belts sprigs of bubon, St John's wort and verbena.

The Queen at last crowned the king, or, rather, presented him with his crown, which was a wreath of clematis. The couple then received from each of their followers a vow of fidelity and a small offering in money or kind.

The royal pair led the way to a cleared space. Around it the newfallen ashleaves were heaped in a ring and lighted. Damp and still full of sap, their fire filled the air with tart thick smoke. The

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king started to sing through his nose, producing a roaring wooden voice; he accompanied himself by rattling a bell of horn with his right hand, and beating with his left a human bone on a horse's skull. This was the sign to begin the Parodies, of which, alas, I can only describe two, the first and last of the many performed.

The opening parody was of a foxhunt. A fox was placed in the center of the clearing, and a pack of hounds set after him. The dogs made themselves foolish, for the fox, made of loosely woven ivy, was invisible to them, and they passed heedlessly through or over it following the trace of a true foxskin that had been dragged across the ground in the pattern of an equilateral triangle, the ivy replica lying at one of its corners.

The closing parody was a joust. Riding blinded sheep, crippled dwarfs met each other in the lists with weapons that, though miniature, were real enough. Perhaps the smoke of the leaves, nearly blinding by then, veiled the bloodiness of the spectacle.[4]

A banquet followed the Parodies. I retain only one of its details.

A shoat prepared for the royal table was filleted with rhubarb thread in such a way that a red letter B appeared on its chest. After the king had tasted the meat of the animal, he stood up and demanded the attention of the company. Then putting a golden boar's head over his own, he opened his suit of leaves to lay bare

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his chest: the skin between the nipples, unmarked at first, soon showed the trace of a pink B, and the letter affirmed itself until it was a brilliant red.

The banquet over, there was dancing. The king and his nine "abbreviators" opened with a prescribed ritual dance, whose nature I am ignorant of. It appears to have been performed to the accompaniment of a kind of mangle (*avec de la musique issue d'une calandreuse*). Afterwards there was general dancing, to the music of flutes, jew's-harps, harps and oaklog drums.

Roland to Madame Miot (II)

In 1451 political circumstances led to the destruction of Sylvius's shrine. A large gang of "orthodox" Gypsies were imported from the Low Countries to do the work; they did it thoroughly. They massacred many of the sect, Gypsy or not. The glen was razed, its spring polluted, its sacred tree cut to bits, its royal stone smashed, even its thriving vines uprooted.

It is said that the Queen led the glen's defense, at first by force of arms, later, when the woods had been fired, with pleas for the sparing of her people.[5] She herself was not slain, but made prisoner in the king's name and sent to Rome for trial before high dignitaries of the church. Summarily condemned as a witch, she succeeded in her appeal to the extent of being allowed to present her case to the pope, Pius II.

The pope received her without her judges or her guards, alone except for an actuary who transcribed their interview. Officially destroyed, the transcription was smuggled out and sold to one of the Queen's loyal followers. Here is the version I once saw, or as much of it as I can reconstruct from notes set down at the time.

The Queen. If I forsook the glory of public martyrdom, among the tatters of my people, forsook burning with them, and not leaving them; if I left them, and the other Sylvius and all my children, who will burn alone, or endure the rotting cold of their hills; if I submitted to a king not my king, not fit to be my subject, and submitted to the secular petty fury of moles: it is not because I do not want to burn, but because I want to burn royally. And you shall do the burning—you are fit for that.

The Pope. I granted your request firstly because you are known to me, as I to you; secondly because I am curious (and yet too delicate: that combination has put hopes of happiness beyond me); thirdly because I have a favor to ask of you. It is a trivial favor.

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You see, a few weeks ago an inexplicable wound opened in my left thigh. It has refused to leave me, and I suffer from it no little.

The Queen. I have come to say what I have to say. I have been speaking for months and those about me hear a devil's voice. They hear it even when I am silent—they cannot understand their terror! You can understand, yet you must listen, for the end must be true to the beginning, and what was born in water must die in fire.

The Pope. Whatever you came for, you are here for my reasons, and chiefly for my wounded thigh. It is strange that it was only a few days ago that I imagined a connection between my wound and your captivity, even though I had just learned you were to be sent here when the ill declared itself. The other day I mentioned the matter lightly to my nephew and he grew very pale. Delegations of well-wishers have appeared at punctual intervals since, to advise me, with the most respectful discretion, that I should deal leniently with you. Of course I laughed at all of them. And then I thought, how worried they will be for themselves! They will soon start hunting down poor Gypsies whose looks have happened to cross theirs, there will be murders open and obscure, and sleepless nights, and bad dreams by day, and much time lost. I am sickened by such affairs. Are you my enemy? If you are, you are so less than others: there are remoter lands where error is mightier. So I decided to have you come to me, that you might try to cure me. (The Queen laughed.) Perhaps I should elaborate: you may *try*. It is your certain failure that interests me. Afterwards, the wound will eventually heal of itself. This is a slow answer to your presumptions, but it will wither them wholly.

The Queen. You came out of my belly, you sucked my breasts: noble boy, consider who I am! I have no presumptions but those of my true worship. My soul has been wrapped in honey. I play with curious shells, branches and trusting animals, and with blood and the smells of sperm and the dead. I have no need to work miracles: they happen about me. Your thigh! And your dead mythologies! Does Actæon or St Sebastian hallow the dim unease of your pain? Is learning only for fools? When next you pass an anthill, approach it and study its perfection, and think of your failing powers: and think of Alva when they carry you past its leaves...

The Pope. Alba no longer. You will hang and not burn[6]; yours is a common offence.

He turned the Queen back to her judges, who submitted her to

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the Question, as was usual, before ordering her execution. Charged with various acts of malevolent witchcraft, she of course denied them all. The account of her last hours is found in the official transcript of the trial:

The person under examination was first tied with rope; then she was fitted with Spanish boots and stretched out on the ladder; no answers were forthcoming to the questions asked, and her eyes were constantly open. The ladder was dropped and raised again. After that she was poured a draught. Then the Spanish boots were tightened. All of the hair of her body was shaved; fire was passed under her nose and behind her ears; afterwards she was again strappadoed, hanging in the air for a whole hour. During this time she remained silent. Later, when she spoke, an appeal to the Devil, who was addressed as Triton, was all she uttered. Her voice was cool, unstrained, and her face colored. She was sprinkled, rubbed and smoked with lighted sulfur; once more she was strappadoed, and she cried out.

The person under examination was extended on the ladder and given a draught. She was burned anew with sulfur. Again she was raised, and another draught, which was swallowed with difficulty, after which she sank down as if she were about to go to sleep. She was again burned with sulfur, under her chin, under her arms, in her secret parts. Again strappadoed. *Triton, have pity on me!* were her only words. After that she was calm for a rather long time, and, although she was called to, there was no answer, gasping as she was, her face still flushed, without tears, however, but only drops of sweat on her forehead.

The person under examination was newly stretched. Then the Spanish boots were screwed tight; and again a draught, which was not swallowed, no matter what means were employed. After which she remained calm, without complaint of any pain.

The person under examination had just been strappadoed once more and rubbed with sulfur, when a grey butterfly began fluttering about her. Seeing it, the person under examination twisted her head towards it so hard that the torturer, with his helpers, could hardly turn it back. The butterfly then flew towards the window, which was half open, and after resting on the sill a while, disappeared outside. At the moment of the butterfly's appearence, the face of the person under examination had become horribly pale, her mouth screwed up, her lips blue; but as soon as the insect disappeared she was completely calm. She was taken off the ladder and lain on some straw. They brought vinegar for

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her to breathe, but she was dead. The clock had just struck six.

The undersigned, notary public, certifies, etc.

Tota Philosphia, inquit Plato, nihil est aliud, quam quaedam commentatio mortis, neque aberrat mea quidem sententia. Cur enim praecepta bene vivendi discimus, nisi ut bene mori sciamus. Comœdia quidem est nostra vita, cuius ultimus actus etc.—so wrote that pope in a later sententious moment. Those who are elevated in this world exude the sublime cruelty of the insane.

Yet the pope relented at last. At the end of the trial minutes the verdict reads (although the Queen was already dead): *Convicta et combusta.*

Roland to Madame Miot (III)

Yesterday, to my surprise, I received a long letter about the glen of Allova and its former role as a shrine. The writer was some American crank who had gotten hold of a few facts (even those he garbled). I plan to send him a curt note that should thoroughly deflate him.

Perhaps I am wrong in doing this—there are few enough who show even a misguided interest in poor Sylvius and his Queen. Since that ancient raid on the glen the sect's history has been a sad one: fits of enthusiasm fading into long wastes of abandonment. In our century the apathy of the believers has been such that the *Barilone* of Massa may fall into ruin.

One of my dearest friends, Jehan de Sfè, among the last members of the sect, went quite mad as a result of its disintegration. Since he had been associated with us politically, he prudently left Paris for Valence last winter; and I payed him a brief visit there. Presenting myself at his villa, I waited for him in the library: after a few minutes Sfè came in, walking backwards, and cried, *Roi vous veut risée le plaît qu'en l'or rèche homme!* Not making head or tail of this I asked him to repeat what he had said several times and finally to write it down. He did all I asked patiently and courteously. On the slip of paper he handed me I read:! *Riov suov ed risialp leuq dnaloR rehc noM.* He had written this reverse sentence as rapidly as I might have written it normally. After I had had him read it aloud—he uttered the same sounds as he had at first done—, I understood that he both spoke and wrote backwards, and that in doing so he carefully respected the distinction between the written and the spoken word, even though it was here made singularly

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arduous: writing, he reversed the letters of his sentences; speaking, he reversed their sounds. Once the necessary civilities were dispensed with, I asked him, fascinated, to recite me several classical tirades. It was with a truly manic grandeur that he pronounced Phèdre's

Et chatte à oir passa ré y tend toutes une Eve est-ce!

Then, knowing Sfè to be a talented musician, I asked him to perform for me. At the harpsichord a similar prodigy occurred: accompanying himself, he sang Rousseau's setting of *Se tu m'ami* from end to beginning with an ease that flabbergasted me. But soon pity and sadness at knowing an old friend lost (for conversation with him was so laborious that it would have been impossible in serious matters) overcame my somewhat unwholesome curiosity; and I took my leave. Sfè's sister wrote me a few months ago that his peculiarity had lasted until the day he had his cataracts couched. The operation not only failed: after a few hours of lucidity, during which he incessantly proclaimed his fidelity to the Queen, it took his life.

On my arrival here, I had charged myself with one final duty, that of ensuring the perpetuation of the Queen's monument. Last week I travelled with it by land as far as Houlgate, there hiring a small fishingboat, which I took out myself, desiring to conceal the nature and destination of my cargo. After rowing for several hours, I happened to pass close to another boat; the fisherman in it, pointing seawards, shouted that if I continued, my goal would be in sight within half an hour. Surprised, I thanked him and rowed on. Soon I spied a small island, whose very existence had been unknown to me (I have since been unable to discover it on any map.) The place was rocky, completely uninhabited, and sparsely planted. Several hundred yards from the center of its southern shore I sank the memorial of the Queen in the sea; it now rests in about twenty feet of water.

Since then, except for this letter, I have abandoned all work. It is practically impossible for me to write; but I had expected at least to assemble my new notes on Dictys of Crete and on "myself" —it seems, by the way, that my counterpart did indeed write not ζωδιακοῦ but σεληναίου.

I cannot even weep; I only let fall a few occasional burning tears. I have given up hope for Marie Phlipon, and I have nothing to hope from her, either—I am told she now claims to have always

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considered me a sexless being! I do not mind her thinking so, but must she declare it so loudly that it reaches my ears? My end is at hand; even so I will not be a burden to others; and you shall remain my example. Those of your stamp have a single law, it is written in their hearts, there too is my rule: engrave my pardon there.

Where is another true heart to be found? I have left my own in a wicked magnet. Πάντα ὕδωρ εστί.

In what condition do you now see my soul? How do you judge me? Listen: I am in despair.

Madama, vi riverisco con tanto il cuor.
THALES

(Ten days later Roland, learning of his wife's execution, wandered from Rouen several miles into the countryside, and after pinning to his breast a scrawled explanation of his act, killed himself near Bourg-Beaudoin. He was buried on the spot. Aside from the information it contains, his letter is curious for being addressed to Madame Miot; he had attended the burial of her ashes three years before.)

Miss Dryrein and the Barilone

From Roland's letter I gleaned a wealth of facts concerning my prize adze. I was confident too that I had found the answer to the will's third question, and I hurried to New York to verify my findings with Miss Dryrein, the executrix, before going to court with them.

But if Miss Dryrein was impressed and satisfied by my ability to explain the adze's significance, she destroyed my hopes of having the final answer. My hypothesis was that the old man was King Sylvius; that his beard was that of the boar's head he put on at the Sylvian feast; and that the Gypsies who ravaged the glen literally or symbolically shaved it, probably by castrating the king.

Miss Dryrein dismissed this theory with a simple No. Without explanation, she showed me a movie Mr Wayl had taken during one of his trips. Isidore Fod, who had accompanied Mr Wayl (long before the scandal that ruined his career), spoke a commentary to it:

We are going to see various details of the *Barilone*, that strange underground palace discovered this summer near Massa Maritti-ma, west Sienna. The closeup shows how the discovery was

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made. When coal was found in large quantities in the region, mining operations were begun in great haste so as to relieve the area's chronic unemployment. Some miners were working a vein of mundic when they came upon these giant ants that we see here, extracting brasses (as they call pyrites crystals) from the surrounding material. When the miners tried to find out where the ants came from, they accidentally opened a hole in the ceiling of the *Barilone*. Unfortunately two workers fell through the hole. Now we see a parade led by a band with its banner reading *Fanfara di Vicq d'Azyr*—he was one of the miners killed, the one who opened up the hole. Of course the discovery brought quite a lot of tourism to the town, and even temporary prosperity—hence the parade. Here we see Signor Grembo-Maledetti, the president of the mining company, inaugurating the entrance to the *Barilone*. The name *Barilone*, which means big vat, derives from the shape of the palace, which consists of one enormous barrelvaulted hall. Its walls are covered with interesting frescoes. Here is a sample of them. In the leftmost of these three paintings we see a clearing ringed with vinecovered trees. A group of vagabonds attacks a gathering of gentlefolk at a sumptuous outdoor banquet. In the righthand painting we have the same scene after the attackers have left—the ground covered with the bodies of the slain, the trees cut down or burned: no living thing, animal or plant, remains. Unfortunately the middle space has been badly damaged, and one cannot see what happens there.

The reel ended. Turning on the lights, Miss Dryrein looked at me questioningly; but I did not understand. She shook her head resignedly, and her attention to my predicament ebbed augustly.

A few months later I visited Massa myself, to see if there were no visible remnants of that "middle" fresco.

At the Massa chamber of commerce an official gave me a note and told me to proceed to the house of Monroë Fesso, custodian of the *Barilone*. Signor Fesso lived near the coalmines that now deface the hills behind Massa. As I approached the front door, framed with dried twigs, of his modest marble house, I noticed a curious chirrupping noise, to which I paid no attention. As I knocked, however, the chirrupping grew suddenly to a fierce squeal, causing me to back away. Sig. Fesso, appearing around the corner of the house, hurried up to reassure me. The source of the noise was harmless, if unusual. Despite its proximity to the mines, the local electrical company had not laid its cables as far as Sig. Fesso's house. Unable to install a doorbell for the many

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tourists needing his services, the guardian of the *Barilone* had found a novel substitute. The dried twigs framing the door were not twigs at all, but hundreds of tan grasshoppers tied to each other and fastened to the door-frame like a vine. Normally the grasshoppers were subdued (during their mating season they nevertheless caused confusions), but at the approach of a visitor they broke into lively music, effectively summoning Sig. Fesso, even from the far side of his house. (Indeed, that was where my arrival had found him. He had been in his vegetable garden, doing his spring digging. Noticing that he wore a strange vest of leather fitted with thin close-set iron spikes, I asked him its function. With some embarrassment he explained that he used it to smooth the worked earth: after digging each patch he would roll over it, his vest then quickly and efficiently filling the office of a rake. Its only drawback, he said, was that it dirtied him—he was in fact smirched from head to foot.)

Sig. Fesso directed the way to the entrance of the *Barilone*, a Babylonian concrete portal. Its lintel bore an inscription that began *Inaugurato da Silvio Grembo-Maledetti* ... and gave the date and a brief prose poem. On the cement flag before the door I remarked two parallel X's about ten inches long, which I took to be the mark of Mr Wayl's presence at the inauguration; for he was known to sport shoes mounted on X-shaped springs.

As he passed through the door Sig. Fesso curtly bowed his head, saying: Amen! A dark corridor in the hillside led to the *Barilone* proper, a semicylindrical hall a hundred yards long, forty yards wide, and fifteen yards high down its center. Halfway to the far end a metal partition divided the hall into equal parts, but it was perforated with so many intersecting abstract designs it scarcely troubled one's view. On either side of this screen vertical bands of frescoes had been painted, those nearest it identical in width and disposition, those farther from it growing increasingly disparate and irregular as they approached the ends of the hall. Most of the frescoes had been so mutilated as to be illegible—a general desquamation had marred every surface of the *Barilone;* but in some cases, where the paint itself had fallen, their drawings, in Cologne earth, were still apparent.

One painting, nearly intact, showed an ecclesiastical figure gloating over a book presented to him by a liveried servant who had opened it at the title-page. The only recognizable words of the title were: *vatter der bapst Pius*. Pope Pius was drawn in curious caricature like a jack of spades.

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Of another fresco, only a signature remained, neatly spelled: *Bernardinvs Pintvrichivs Pervsinvs.*

In a third fresco, a bishop who lifted his eyes sanctimoniously heavenwards held out his arms in benediction over a mob engaged in stoning with oyster-shells a proud bloodied woman.

The "middle" fresco of Mr Wayl's movie was underneath this scene. I examined it with my flashlight. All I found was the outline of certain tendrils near the bottom of the picture, one of which bore the remains of greenish, white coloring; reaching down from above, a hand clutched the tendrils.

I called over Sig. Fesso, who had sat down next to the entrance to read *Tintin en Amérique*, and asked him to identify the subjects of the "middle" fresco and the one over it. Asked who the sanctimonious bishop was, he said:

Che grillo! Amen.

Of the stoned woman: *Che pazzia!* Amen

Of the plants in the "middle" fresco: *Alba!* Amen.

His first two answers angered me, the third released all the fury of months of hope and labor made vain. Crying out, So it's Alva! Enough of Alva! I grabbed poor Sig. Fesso by the throat and knocked him on the head with my flashlight. I think I should have killed him if the pain inflicted by the spikes of his gardening-vest had not made me let him drop. Leaving him unconscious on the ground, I fled, weeping with shame and disappointment, from the *Barilone* and from Massa.

Monroë Fesso quickly recovered from my violence—I learned as much from the next day's paper. I was sorry I could not atone for my behaviour, especially as reflection had convinced me that his answers were not the impertinences I had taken them to be. What I heard as *Che grillo!* and (forgetting the position of the tonic accent) *Che pazzia!* had surely been *Cirillo* and *Ipazia*, protagonists in just such a scene as that fresco portrayed. Had he perhaps meant something else too by *Alba?*

All Things Are Water

I had fled to Rome: thence I travelled by plane to Paris, and on to Houlgate by train. My hope, my last hope, was that an inspection of Roland's monument to the Queen might lead to the answer I could not find otherwise.

Roland's unmapped island had come out of obscurity—it was none other than Cliff-le-Bone, the vacation resort. An efficient

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ferry service set me on it the same morning I arrived in Houlgate. It was early in the summer, and there were few tourists; but among those, I was lucky enough to find a group of amateur skindivers, called the Cogito Swimmers Club, who had picked Cliff-le-Bone for their yearly outing. As their name implied, the Cogito Swimmers were interested in more than the practical aspects of skindiving—they believed that prolonged immersion helped introspection and metaphysical speculations; yet they were delighted to help me look for the monument.

That afternoon, we hired a boat at one of the twelve piers forming the island's pleasant harbor. I let the Swimmers lead the search, for I was inexpert in handling myself underwater and in reconnoitering the submarine landscape.

Following them, I reflected on a telegram forwarded to me earlier in the day at the island's hotel. My lawyers in New York informed me that the letter I had studied at Fitchwinder University was not in Roland's hand and had been declared a forgery; that consequently Mr Wayl's will had been thrown out as a complete hoax; and that Beatrice and Isidore Fod were to inherit the fortune. I had promptly decided to fight these decisions. Now, gliding through a cold lunar world, I found my confidence waning. The undersea manifested its effect on my brain, as the Cogito Swimmers had described it: memories flooded my head.

Was not Mr Wayl, whose eccentricity had been demonstrated at his own funeral, capable of forging Roland's letter, and a history's worth of documents as well? What of the poem Professor Bumbè had shown me and its faint odor of anachronism? Who had ever heard of the novel in which I had read of the Johnstones, with its view of life so unlike the warm Auerbach's? Was Abe Johnstone's preposterous letter also a "plant"? Mr Wayl had the money to bribe town clerks and customs officials and musicologists into helping him. He could have hired without any trouble a "policeman" to keep me out of the Silver Glen. As for the Voe-Doges' painting, were they not his relatives? And since Mr Wayl knew Namque-Schlendrian (to whom he had given the saddle showing the Queen's birthplace), perhaps he also knew Namque. If I could not believe that Félix and Bun had wittingly tricked me, they might well have been involuntary accomplices. For Mr Wayl must have foreseen the path my research would inevitably follow, and he could accordingly set along it trap after trap. As to why he should play such an elaborate trick on me, I was at a loss—a modest if dilettantish mulatto hardly seemed prey worthy of such

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trouble. Yet I felt that I had, at the end of long folly, reached the sad truth, the truth of my delusion. As we hunted over the rough Atlantic floor, I was sure we should find nothing.

Having inspected fields of squat crags, we arrived at a sandy patch, strewn only with shingle and lesser shells, except for one hump of stone rising in the center of that place. An unstony suppleness on the surface of the hump caught my attention, and beckoning to the other swimmers, who were already proceeding, I led the way to it. The seeming rock stood at least ten feet high. As soon as we were next to it, we saw that its stoniness was an illusion created by profuse sea growths that greyly clothed what lay beneath them—a clumsy jumble of hawsers and smaller ropes, piled over the inverted skeleton of a dory. We set to work removing this slimy covering. It was not necessary to move the waterlogged wreck to see what had been hidden underneath.

A thumbshaped structure[7], six feet high and four feet thick, rested on the seafloor, a clocklike mechanism forming the greater part of its mass.

The uppermost part of this mechanism was a screen on which were figured the four quarters of the moon. They were, from left to right, a black circle; a like circle with a segment of white (now yellowed) on its right edge; a white circle; and a black circle with a segment of white on its left edge.

Behind a shield of thin metal that hid its juncture with the machinery below, a slender clock-hand of white wood rose across the panel of moons. The hand's base being fixed, its tip necessarily described an arc of about ninety degrees across the panel, moving from the left limb of the leftmost circle to the right limb of the rightmost circle. The exact phase of the moon was shown by the point on which the hand rested, whether on one of the circles or between any pair. It now crossed the entirely black disc, indicating, as was the case, moonless nights.

On the level below, placed in a steel frame, were the gears that determined the progress of the wooden hand. Their proportions were those of a large clock, except for one (evidently in direct contact with the hand) whose extraordinary size signified a periodicity of abnormally great length. Although I could not measure this gear, its circumference was no doubt appropriate to the interval of a lunar month.

At one point on the rim of this gear, a short metal pin extruded laterally. Once in the course of each complete revolution, the pin would trip by its upward motion (the gear moved clockwise) a

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hook fixed to the topmost bar of the steel frame. The point of this hook was inserted in one of the recesses of a horizontal toothed rod, above which, barely visible behind the shield, was a slender spring. Spring and rod were joined at their right ends. Their position suggested that they followed the movement of the clock-hand in a horizontal line from left to right. Although the connection was hidden, the spring certainly controlled the clock-hand (a wire fitted vertically to the right end of the rod was possibly the means).

The purpose of the arrangement was clear. At the close of each lunar month, the pin on the gear's rim tripped the hook that held the rod in place, and the spring pulled the clock-hand (as well as the rod) from its rightmost to its leftmost position. It could then start anew its progress from left to right across the panel of moons.

A pendulum hung beneath the cage of gears. It had an ordinary shaft, but a singular construction had taken the place of the weight. A conical net of light wire, perhaps two feet high and as wide at the base, dangled at the shaft's end. Within it were a dozen silver herring which, all swimming in one direction, propelled the net with them, and with it the pendulum, which in turn imparted its movement to the mechanism of the moon-clock.

The pendulum was controlled in the following way. A cord made out of twisted wires of great fineness was attached to each side of the pendulum just above the joint of the net. Both cords then passed (one to the right, the other to the left) through a cluster of pulleys suspended from the steel frame above, midway between the top of the pendulum and the machine's outer edge. The cord, descending outwards from the pulleys, was fastened to a loop at the top of a pyramidal lead weight. Another similar cord, also tied to the weight, hung straight from the edge of the steel frame directly over it, where its length was adjusted by a spring reel.

Beneath the two weights—one at each side of the machine—massive metallic cups hung on rods of iron. The center of the cups' upper surface was of thin flexible metal, covering an apparently hollow interior.

The length of each cord was regulated so that when the herring had propelled their net to one end of the pendulum's arc, the weight on that side would fall on the surface of the cup beneath it. The struck diaphragm of thin metal would then emit considerable vibration into the surrounding water: this would sufficiently startle the fish to make them turn and swim away in the opposite direction. (By the time they recovered from their fright a new

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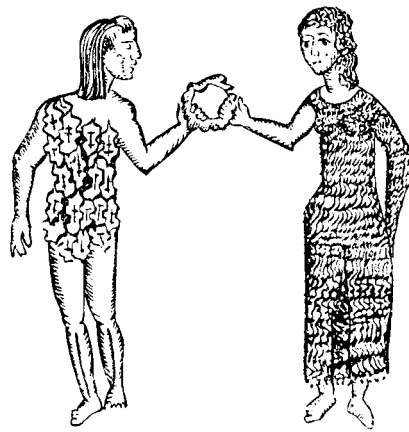

clash turned them round again.) The flexibility of the cup's surface also caused the dropped weight to bounce slightly, thus aiding the reversal of the pendulum's motion.

The tension of the reels, which exercised an upward pull on the weights; the ratio of the pulleys through which the cords passed; and the heaviness of the weights—all had been adjusted to a nice equilibrium that permitted the frail momentum of the fish to keep them, and the clock, in motion.

The herring were fed through a slender funnel-shaped net of threadlike close-meshed wire, connected to the pendulum net by an opening too small to permit the egress of the captive fish. The larger end of the feeding-net hung from a metal branch projecting from the rear of the steel frame. From the same branch was suspended a luminous smooth ball fashioned out of several tiger-cowrie shells—it floated in the mouth of the feeding net as a lure to the small sea creatures that were the herring's food.

The entire life cycle of the herring took place within their prison; for how could the school have been replenished except by reproduction? There was no entrance for anything but animalcules. As for the dead fish, they drifted, eventually, through the bottom of the net. A fraction of an inch below the net's rim, attached by no visible means, floated a film of metallic dust. When a Cogito Swimmer probed it curiously with a fishing-spear, the point of his weapon disappeared. I recognized the presence of fleshmetal; and I did not doubt that the builder of the moon-clock had, like Inno Johnstone, used some sort of magnet (perhaps the wires of the net were magnetized) to hold it in place. The dead

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herring and any other waste matter would, in passing from the net, be volatilized by the suspended element, which also afforded invincible protection against attack from below.

On the sand under the net, the very color of sand, a fat ray lolled, alive but unmoving. Crabs of similar color rested on its back. They were perhaps waiting for scraps that might pass through the thin opening that separated the layer of fleshmetal from the net's edge.

The moon-clock stood on four iron columns sunk in the sand, one at each corner of the steel gearcase, under which the pendulum and its adjuncts hung, and upon which the panel of moons rested. The lower part was open to the water; but the gearcase was sealed with watertight glass panels, while an hermetic glass bell covered the clock face.

Surmounting the clock, at the very top of the glass bell, the builder had left a flat surface on which there were two figures, perhaps six inches high. One was a man, white, naked except for a crown of little faded leaves. The other was a black woman, also naked. The man was caught in a net of tangled white wire. Their features and limbs were carved crudely, except for the woman's vulva, which had been carefully represented as a mouth, with red tonguetip protruding between tiny sharp teeth. With one hand she lifted one of her breasts; with the other she held out a minute golden adze to the trapped king, who stretched his hands towards her.

On an exterior metal band that separated this scene from the panel of moons, two words had been roughly scratched: *Mundorys Lorsea.*

Having watched one of the Swimmers shoot the lethargic ray with a bolt from his undersea gun, I was unable to stand the cold any longer, and I swan quickly up to our boat. A hot drink at the hotel restored me.

The moon-clock having failed to yield the third answer, I decided to end my investigations. My long search had consumed more than the little money I had once possessed—I had even had to pawn the adze. There was nothing for me to do but return home and begin paying my debts.

. . . . . .

The Conversions will be published in June by Random House, $4.95.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Harry Mathews *(The Conversions)* was born in New York in 1930. After studying music at Harvard and the Ecole Normale de Musique, he devoted himself entirely to writing poetry, publishing during recent years in various American magazines. *The Conversions* is his first prose work. Mathews is one of the founders of the quarterly *Locus Solus*, where parts of his novel first appeared. *The Conversions* will be published this spring by Random House in America and by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in England. Mathews has lived in Europe since 1952.

Mauro Senesi *(The Revolutionary)* a young Tuscan now living in Florence, writes both in English and Italian. His first novel, *I pieni poteri*, was published two years ago. His short stories have been printed by many Italian newspapers, and two of them appeared in a recent issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

INTERVIEW

Elisabeth Niebuhr *(Interview with Mary McCarthy)* graduated from Radcliffe in 1960, and spent last year in France studying French history on a Fulbright grant. She is now working in Washington D.C.

PORTFOLIO

Pierre Schneider *(on Bram van Velde)* a highly esteemed essayist and critic in France, is bilingual, and besides his many portfolio texts for THE PARIS REVIEW, has written frequently for American magazines and newspapers.

CHRONICLE

Clancy Sigal *(Last Day at the Agency)* won the 1961 Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship for *Going Away*, an informal autobiography starting with the author's UCLA days, from which *Last Day at the Agency* is taken. Sigal, who was reared in Chicago, now lives in London. He is the *New Statesman*'s television critic, and articles of his have appeared in the *Observer* and *Encounter*. *Going Away* is due for publication early in 1962.

POETRY

Robert Bly *(Five American Poems)* who has published in THE PARIS REVIEW several times, is editor of *The Sixties*. His poems have also appeared in *Poetry* and *Hudson Review*.

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John Heath-Stubbs *(The Peacock and the Snake)* is the author of several books of poems published in England and the United States, of which the most recent is *The Triumph of the Muse*. He has taught in Egypt and the United States recently, and has contributed reviews to a number of journals.

John Hollander *(Lazienka)* is the author of a critical book about music and poetry, *The Untuning of the Sky*, and numerous articles. *A Crackling of Thorns*, his first book of verse, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets award. The poem printed in this issue is from his new book which will be published this spring.

Philip Levine *(The Turning)* a native of Detroit, is living in California. He formerly studied at the Iowa Workshop.

Denise Levertov *(Love Song)* was born and raised in England, but emigrated to America after the war, on her marriage to the American novelist Mitchell Goodman. She has published four books of her poems.

George Macbeth *(Eating Ice-Cream with a Girl)* has published poems in various English weeklies and monthlies. He is a talks producer for the BBC.

Bink Noll *(Per Singulos Dies Benedicimus Te)* is publishing his first book of poems with Harcourt Brace in the autumn of 1962.

Adrienne Rich *(End of an Era)* has published two books of poems, *A Change of World* and *The Diamond Cutters*. She is spending this year in Europe on a renewal of her Guggenheim grant. Ordinarily she lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband and three sons.

May Swenson *(Death Invited)* will bring out her third book of poems, *Things Taking Place*, early in 1962. She has recently returned from Europe to the United States, and is working for New Directions.

Charles Tomlinson *(John Maydew, or the Allotment)* is an English poet who first received wide attention in America with the publication of *Seeing Is Believing*. He teaches English at Bristol.

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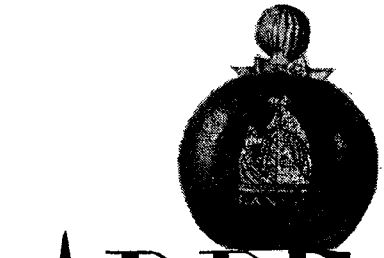

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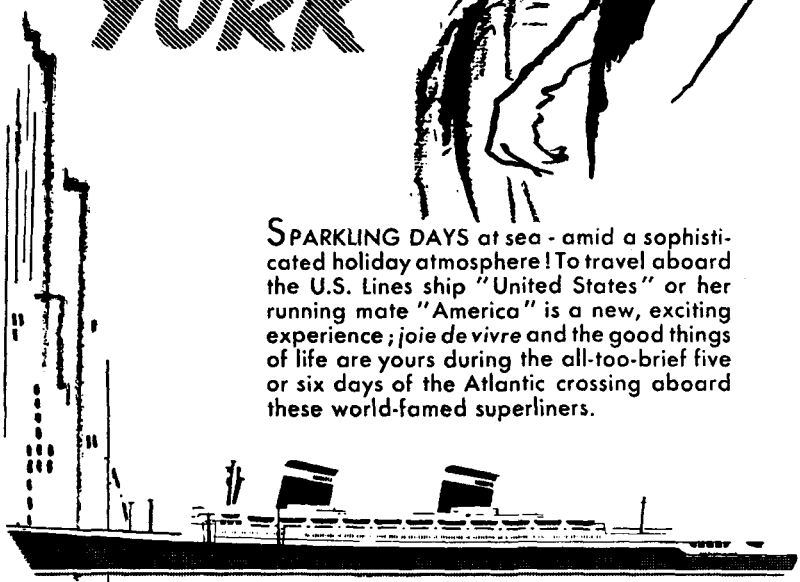

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